Tampere University

Inessa Lotonina

Analyzing Parasocial Influence of Celebrity Endorsement on Russian Millennials

ABSTRACT

Inessa Lotonina: Analyzing Parasocial Influence of Celebrity Endorsement on Russian Millennials
Master's Thesis
Tampere University
MDP in Leadership for Change
April 2019

Social media plays an important part in modern society. Marketing professionals started to pay attention to social media in search for new ways to promote products and services online. One of the most recognized ways to promote the product is with the use of celebrity endorsement. Marketing scholars pinpointed that using celebrity endorsement for reaching Millennial consumers is very effective. During the process of endorsement, a publicly recognized person promotes the product by appearing with it in an advertisement. Celebrities appeared in product promotion ever since television set has become a necessary household item. Television viewers were highly interested in celebrities and researchers attempted to explain why the viewers are so captivated by them. In 1956, Horton and Wohl invented parasocial interactions theory to explain the phenomenon of fascination with celebrities. Horton and Wohl were the first to suggest that celebrities are effective in product promotion due to viewers' aspiration to be more similar to them.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how parasocial interactions shape consumer behavior of Russian Millennials. The research will pay close attention to psychological undertones of publicly recognized individuals' persuasion on their followers that influences their consumer behavior. Parasocial interactions between celebrity and their followers constitutes the research phenomenon of this thesis. Parasocial influence on consumers is still not clearly explained by the theoretical knowledge. An attempt to address this issue was made by parasocial interactions theory as well as by endorser source effect literature. However, recent research articles regarding parasocial interactions point out that new social media context creates a need for further investigation.

Semi-structured interviews were used in this research, with overall twelve participants from Russia. All participants were female Millennials aged 25-28. Seven reoccurring themes were identified from the interview data, showcasing how parasocial interactions influenced consumer behavior of social media followers. These themes include pursuing celebrity experience, establishing high level of trust with celebrity, pursuing self-transformation through meaning-based consumption, adopting celebrity's lifestyle and habits, fulfilling the need to belong, stepping outside the consumption comfort zone and actively pursuing higher level of attractiveness. This research contributes to both parasocial interactions and celebrity endorsement literature by providing consumers' perspective on persuasiveness of social media endorsements. It was revealed that followers see celebrities that they emotionally engage with as trustable individuals and are willing to purchase their products without hesitation. As followers are open to try new products, it creates wide possibilities for marketers to utilize celebrity endorsement to its full potential. The biggest opportunity can be identified in endorsement of beauty and fashion products, since followers revealed great interest in enhancing their physical appearance. However, followers' trust must be maintained by celebrities choosing endorsements wisely and not engaging with promotion of non-related products.

Keywords: Social media marketing, celebrity endorsement, Russian Millennial consumers, parasocial interactions.
The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin Originality Check service.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

Author's email: isl100@aubgalumni.net

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

It is undeniable that social media influences the world we live in. As of July 2018, number of social media users reached 3.3. billion, with 2.23 billion users on Facebook, 1 billion on Instagram and 630 million on Twitter and LinkedIn (Forbes, 2018). Traditional media, such as television and newspapers, are no longer the primal source of information. During recent years media consumption shifted towards the social media (Bruell, 2013). To adjust to this shift, marketers found themselves in a need to change the ways to reach and capture attention of the consumers.

Ever since 2008, rapid decline in television viewing have been acknowledged and consequently led to the decrease in commercial product placements by 15% (Saini, 2008). Social media is becoming inseparable part of modern lifestyle and the amount of time billions of people spend on the social media daily, captures interest of marketers. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) stated that social media represents network of various Web 2.0 applications and drives user-generated content across these applications. Social media has been widely explored and its main function has been identified as to allow and encourage creation and exchange of user-generated content (Luo, Zhang & Duan, 2013).

It is evident that social media has a substantial effect on the world of business. Retailers pointed out that social media marketing efforts raised their revenue by 133% (Bowden, 2014). According to recent statistical data, approximately 80% of business managers evaluated social media to be essential asset for the business development (Bennett, 2014). Businesses aim to cease an opportunity to advertise themselves on social media platforms to the vast audience. Nowadays, social media acts as an electronic word of mouth (eWOM) for companies (Castellano & Dutot, 2017). It is crucial for the companies to find efficient ways to create a reputation for their products online. However, since multitude of companies represent themselves on social media, they have to constantly compete for consumers' attention. Additionally, as social media users tend to avoid online advertising, this imposes a challenge for marketers to find new, more creative ways to advertise online (Shin & Lin, 2016).

In its research priorities, Marketing Science Institute stated that it is necessary to create new product strategies to address the issue of consumer inattention (MSI Research Priorities, 2018). MSI pointed out that this problem relates particularly to Millennial consumers. Millennials represent an important market for the companies as they have a great buying potential and are recognized as avid social media users (Fromm & Garton, 2013). By combining these two facts, there is no surprise that marketers strive to find efficient ways to reach Millennials on social media platforms.

It has been noticed that certain consumers exhibit disproportionate influence on others' purchase decisions; such consumers are called opinion leaders and they have been studied by several researchers (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Lyons & Henderson, 2005). Recently, large number of companies showcased willingness to utilize social media influencers in product endorsement and number of such collaborations is rapidly growing (Lou & Yuan, 2018). It is a common practice for the companies to use celebrities as well as social media influencers to promote their products online. Researchers showed interest in examining online influencers and attention was paid to who can be categorized as such (Cai & Chen, 2012; Li, Lai & Chen, 2011). Social media influencers can be identified as modern-day-celebrities due to their recognition by the audience.

Social media gave virtually everyone a platform to establish themselves as social media celebrities, and with enough subscribers, be noticed by the companies and become an endorser. During recent years, certain active users of social media received massive number of subscribers that follow them on a daily basis. Such vast exposure allows these social media personalities to influence their followers to buy the endorsed products (Audrezet, de Kerviler & Moulard, 2018). Influencer marketing can be defined as marketing effort attempted by the company that is using social media influencer's followers as a target audience for the promotion (Forbes, 2017). Research suggests that in 2018, 39% of participated marketing professionals expressed their intention to allocate more funds towards involving social media influencers for the product promotion (Bevilacqua & Giudice, 2018). Social media influencers promotion of endorsed product is considered to reach consumers more efficiently than traditional advertisements created by companies (Talavera, 2015). Recent research suggested that Twitter users trusted social media influencers' product recommendations in the same way they trusted real-life friends' recommendations (Swant, 2016). This way, followers' purchase decisions are guided by social media influencers, as followers view influencers as a trustable source for product recommendations.

In order to analyze celebrity endorsement in online context, it is necessary to understand human behavior on social media. Uses and gratifications theory strives to explain reasons behind individuals' use of media, especially young consumers (Katz *et al.,* 1974). This theory states that people choose and use media for a specific need that they try to satisfy, reach a level of gratification; media channels have to compete for attention of users by better fulfilling their needs. It is noted that social media holds social influence over individuals, making them change their behavior to feel accepted (Kietzmann *et al.,* 2011). Social media encourages users to share their opinions and experiences. Nevertheless, research suggests that individuals often choose to share personal opinions only when these opinions are in line with the standard of what is appropriate in the society. Additionally, social media represents an environment that users utilize to exhibit shared with a group behavior in order to reach social belonging.

Marketing research asserts that it is important to engage with the consumers and online communities are commonly created around products; interactions between product's followers represent social status value to them (Zhu & Chen, 2015). This way, consumers exhibit interest to follow products that provide them an opportunity to reach aspired social status. Researchers link product affiliation of consumers to their social identification (Onorato & Turner, 2004). Two separate identities are distinguished, personal identity and social identity. Characteristics of individual's personality amount to personal identity; social identity represents the shared identity of the individual's chosen group of association (Onorato & Turner, 2004). Social media studies identify another role of social media as to support development of relationships between individuals online (Safko, 2012). This way, social media supports an environment that is created on the ground of users' free interactions. Researchers point out that individuals are looking to improve their identities with behavior that emphasizes their own personality (Onorato & Turner, 2004). Nevertheless, this behavior must be aligned with the norms of the society. It is argued that individuals change their behavior to adhere to norms of the society and are unwilling to stand out drastically among their peers.

As previously discussed, one of the most recognized effective ways to promote the product in modern marketing, is with the use of celebrity endorsement (Hung, 2014). McCormick (2016) pinpointed that using celebrity endorsement for product promotion is very effective on Millennial consumers. Nature of the process of endorsement has been defined in the following way: endorser represents a publicly recognized person and promotes the product by appearing with it, thus utilizing his/her recognition in the process of promotion (McCracken, 1989). Celebrities have been used in product promotion ever since television set has become a necessary household item. Television viewers paid close attention to celebrities, and researchers

attempted to explain why viewers are so captivated by them. During that time, parasocial interactions theory appeared to explain the phenomenon of fascination with celebrities (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Horton and Wohl were the first to suggest that celebrities can be effective in product promotion because of the viewers' aspiration to be more similar to them.

Parasocial interactions of celebrity and their followers constitutes the research phenomenon of this thesis. Based on the influential nature of social media marketing in modern businesses, and consumer inattention to traditional type of advertisement, celebrity endorsement becomes a powerful tool in addressing consumer audience. The logic behind the endorsers' influence on their followers' consumer behavior is still not clearly defined by marketing literature and is identified as the literature gap that this thesis strives to address. An attempt to explain endorsers' persuasiveness was made by several streams of endorsers' source effect literature (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; McCracken, 1989; McGuire, 1985). It was combined with literature streaming from parasocial interactions theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Topic of parasocial interactions was chosen for this thesis due to its relevancy to the social media marketing. Since theory of parasocial interactions only recently started to be applied to the topic of celebrity endorsement, research literature combining both subjects is scarce. Additionally, recent research articles point out that new social media context creates a need for further investigation of celebrities' parasocial influence on their followers (Chung & Cho, 2017; Lueck, 2015).

1.2. Marketing to Millennials

The range of years attributed to Millennial generation is a subject of debate among marketers as well as academic community. However, in this thesis, time period between 1977 and 1995 will be considered the years range between which Millennials were born (Fromm & Garton, 2013). The authors noted that Millennials tend to share similar patterns of consumption behavior due to the influence of global mass media. Millennial generation accounts for 74 Million in U.S. alone, in comparison to much smaller 46 million population of previous Generation X (Nowak *et al.,* 2006). In 2018, U.S. millennials were predicted to spent $200 billion, making them the most spending and powerful consumer generation yet (Forbes, 2017). McCormick (2016) emphasized that Millennials' buying potential is on the rise. It was revealed that Millennials utilize interactive media for information seeking as well as entertainment

purposes (Moore, 2012). Social media plays an important role for Millennials, and 62% of them stated that company's efforts to engage them on social media platforms play a crucial role in determining whether they will be this company's devoted customer (Forbes, 2017).

Research suggests that Millennial consumers show negative attitude to the tedious persuasion attempts and to the source of this persuasion, if they recognize that such an attempt occurred (Henrie & Taylor, 2009). Same conclusions were reached by examining Millennials' interactive media usage and the author suggests that marketers should abstain from the use of aggressive persuasion techniques towards Millennials (Moore, 2012). It has been advised not to aggravate Millennials with excessive contact as well as target them with unrealistic promotions (Henrie & Taylor, 2009). The authors advice marketers to follow today's popular trends among Millennials, as they follow these trends very closely and base their purchase decisions on what is currently popular among their peers (Fromm & Garton, 2013).

In line with the content of Forbes' article, research shows that Millennials are known to use internet to follow and find information on different brands (Moore, 2012). Millennials exhibit a great desire to be a part of social media co-creation process for their favorite brands (Fromm & Garton, 2013). It is also suggested that marketers engage Millennials in conversation to find out what do companies do well and what they do in an unsatisfactory manner and to receive insightful feedback on how to improve (Fromm & Garton, 2013). Millennials show higher level of interactive media use in comparison to Baby Boomers and Generation X (Moore, 2012). Authors argue that Millennials are very active internet users and like to get involved with companies they appreciate on social media (Fromm & Garton, 2013). Millennials are found of on-going conversations with these companies on social media and are interested in building close relationships with them. The authors additionally point out that Millennials are talking about brands to each other on social media and share opinions that marketers should pay close attention to. This is in line with McCormick's (2016) notion that Millennials are vocal on social media about every aspect of their buying experience.

However, Millennials exhibited lower online purchase intentions compared to Baby Boomers and Generation X (Moore, 2012). Millennials are careful buyers who pay close attention to product's price while making a decision to purchase (Fromm & Garton, 2013). However, they are big devotees of companies with social or environmental causes and do not mind paying higher price for these company's products. Fromm and Garton (2013) argue that typical Millennials enjoy instant gratification and appreciate convenience. Millennials are

defined as a generation that is adventurous for new experiences, including with the products they choose.

Fromm and Garton (2013) point out several characteristics of Millennials in their book, that are relevant for the research purpose of this thesis. According to Fromm and Garton (2013), Millennials tend to present themselves in a positive light, including sharing use of certain products on their social media, which supposed to improve their self-evaluation as well as gain approval in the eyes of their social network friends. The authors state that Millennials serve as pointers of social media usage in the society, since they are its avid users. Millennials tend to buy products and services recommended by their friends. The authors make an interesting point about who Millennials consider as an expert; to be an expert it is enough to have practical knowledge in a certain area (Fromm & Garton, 2013). Millennials are more likely to be influenced by a friend who gave positive feedback about the product, versus be persuaded by an advertisement featuring a celebrity in official company promotion campaign.

Noteworthy point was made by McCracken (1989) about potential consumers of the celebrity-endorsed products. It is argued that individuals undergoing role change are significantly reliant on meanings surrounding this new role. Additionally, individuals who are moving from one location to another, were argued to look for meanings that suggest how they should adapt to new environment. Individuals who are moving from one age to another were argued to be significantly influenced by the meanings offered by celebrities (McCracken, 1989). As Millennials interviewed in this study have just started their working life, and many of them had moved to bigger cities for better work opportunities, these notions suggest that the celebrity endorsement might have a considerable influence on them.

Regarding Russian Millennials, no academic research articles were found. This might be due to research on this subject conducted only in Russian. Additionally, it was not possible to locate specific statistics about Russian Millennials' use of social media. However, information regarding marketing to Russian population on the social media was analyzed. This information was obtained primarily from the websites catering to companies that are looking to expend to the Russian market. After careful examination, only several notions were found, that can be applied to this thesis's purpose. The statistics shows that in 2017, 100 million Russians used at least one social media website on a daily basis (Practical Ecommerce, 2017).

Six major social media networks were used in Russia, in the following order of popularity: Vkontakte, YouTube, Odnoklassniki, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter. The statistics further suggests that different social media networks are used by different age groups: 80% of

Vkontakte users are under 34, Odnoklassniki are mainly used by people between 34 and 45 years old, while YouTube attracts users of all ages. Additionally, Facebook and Twitter are mainly used by people with advanced business and social skills, such as company executives. Instagram is mainly used by females between 13 and 34 years of age (Practical Ecommerce, 2017).

Different source also suggests that the majority of Russian social networks are used predominantly by the females, 70% on Odnoklassniki and Instagram platforms, as well as slightly larger than male number of female users on Vkontakte and Facebook (M&M Global, 2017). This is in line with another internet source's notion about female users' predominance on Russian Instagram (Russian Search Marketing, 2016). It is suggested that the majority of Instagram posts are focused on fashion, beauty and products related to them. Additionally, the source points out that in Russian culture, brand names and personal appearance are of great importance. This cultural notion is also supported by another statistical data—9% of all phone and tablet searches in Russia are related to beauty (Russian Search Marketing, 2016).

1.3. Problem setting and research questions

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how parasocial interactions shape consumer behavior of Russian Millennials. This problem was chosen due to the lack of knowledge about parasocial interactions' influence on the process of celebrity endorsement. The research will pay close attention to psychological undertones of publicly recognized individuals' persuasion on their followers that results in certain consumer behaviors. Research purpose will be addressed by the following research question:

- What themes emerge from parasocial interactions' influence on consumer behavior of Russian Millennials?

As consumer behavior is explored in this thesis, parasocial interactions theory was chosen as an appropriate way to address celebrity endorsement, as this theory strives to understand audience's psychology and responsiveness to celebrities' influence. Studying consumers' responses to parasocial influence will allow to expand the theory of parasocial interactions to a new direction—social media, as well as to apply parasocial interactions theory

to celebrity endorsement. In terms of practice, it is necessary to research parasocial interactions in order to reach a deeper understanding of how endorsers can successfully promote products on their social media. Social media creates unique opportunities for endorsers to promote the product worldwide. However, if the endorsement is implemented without consideration to existing factors, it can cause a financial loss. Such situation can be observed on the examples of various YouTube influencers' endorsements, that failed to persuade their followers and were received with public backlash.

Recently, marketing literature started to apply parasocial interactions theory to marketing on social media and looks at how the interactions between the endorser and the follower might affect the success of the endorsement. The most current discussion regarding parasocial interactions and celebrity endorsement was conducted by Escalas and Bettman (2017) and Chung and Cho (2017). In both articles, the authors conducted quantitative research in order to analyze how parasocial interactions enhance effectiveness of celebrity endorsement. Escalas and Bettman (2017) pointed out that parasocial interactions are connected to the need to belong that consumers fulfill by obtaining certain products endorsed by celebrities that they follow. Chung and Cho (2017) attributed effect of parasocial interactions influence to the increase in source trustworthiness.

Since followers can engage in parasocial interactions both with very recognized celebrities, such as Hollywood actors, as well as with less recognized social media celebrities, such as popular YouTubers, this thesis will not distinguish between celebrities based on their level of recognition; all these individuals maintain public recognition and this recognition is utilized in product promotion. Additionally, parasocial interactions theory suggests that parasocial interactions can be established with any public figure that the audience engages with by the process of viewing. In this thesis, a person in possession of public recognition and utilizes this recognition in product endorsement, will be referred to as a celebrity endorser. This definition will be communicated to the respondents, so that they can answer the interview questions referring to any individuals that they follow. Russian Millennials' evaluation of social media endorsers' communication with their followers via posts will be the focus of this research. This study focuses on consumers' perspective and aims to get insights about Russian Millennial social media users of female gender through the use of semi-structured interviews. Due to the fact that no academic articles regarding Russian Millennials were found, this thesis can provide insightful information for further research on this particular group.

Possessing a better understanding of parasocial influence of social media endorsements would improve marketers' expertise and, potentially, the financial success of the endorsements. Interesting finding regarding effectiveness of parasocial interactions was

recently made by Lueck (2015). The author pointed out that followers engaged in parasocial interactions were open to celebrity endorsement as they viewed it as helpful, practical information regarding how to obtain a particular lifestyle. Based on the interview data, it would be possible to distinguish other practical knowledge regarding how to utilize parasocial interactions in celebrity endorsement. Additionally, the topic of parasocial interactions' influence on the audience can have social applications. Social media has become a powerful tool and this thesis' findings can help further researchers to understand how parasocial interactions may be utilized for promoting social causes on the social media, by increasing emotional appeal and engagement with social media users.

1.4. Key concepts

In this thesis, two main streams of literature will be examined to address the research purpose. First concept is celebrity endorsement; it is a process of celebrities utilizing their public recognition in product promotion by appearing with the product in an advertisement (McCracken, 1989). Second concept is parasocial interactions; these interactions represent one-sided relationships between public figures and the audience (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Regarding celebrity endorsement, Meaning Transfer Model (McCracken, 1989) will provide the foundation for examining the research phenomenon. This model consists of three stages: in first stage, meanings are transferred from persons, objects and context to celebrities; in second stage, personal characteristics and cultural meanings are transferred from celebrities to the products they promote; in third stage, meanings and characteristics are obtained by final consumers through the process of using the product (McCracken, 1989).

Match-up hypothesis is another important notion in celebrity endorsement literature. Match-up hypothesis states that endorsement's success depends on the level of product-endorser congruence (Kamins, 1990). Source attractiveness and source credibility are two celebrity endorsement's literature streams addressing characteristics of a successful endorser. Source attractiveness consists of three main components: familiarity, likability and similarity (McGuire, 1985). Source attractiveness model does not focus only on endorser's physical appearance, but consists of personality characteristics, lifestyle and endorser's talents (Erdogan, 1999). Source credibility model maintains that credibility of the celebrity serves as the main factor determining success of the endorsement; this model defines endorser's trustworthiness

and expertise as main factors estimating credibility of the endorser (Erdogan, 1999; Hovland & Weiss, 1951).

Several factors have been defined in parasocial interactions literature as increasing strength of such interactions. These factors will serve as a building block of theoretical framework, addressing connection between consumer and endorser. First factor, perceived similarity, was pinpointed by Tian and Hoffner (2010) as increasing the strength of followers' parasocial interactions. Chung and Cho (2017) stated that viewing endorsers as authentic and believing that they promote the product not only for their own financial gain, leads to increased level of trust in parasocial interactions with these endorsers. Frequency can be described as an aspect measuring how often followers interact with or seek to find more information about a celebrity. Horton and Wohl (1956) proposed that frequency serves as factor strengthening parasocial interactions; the authors stated that amount of time viewers spend observing a celebrity correlates with parasocial interactions' strength. Russell and Stern (2006) stated that strong parasocial emotional attachment causes followers to view celebrity as a significant individual in their life. High level of attraction to media persona is another factor predicting stronger parasocial interactions (Turner, 1993). The author pointed out that public figure's high level of attractiveness causes viewers to pay close attention to them.

Horton and Wohl (1956) stated that media personas that communicate with their fans in a personal way, are increasing the strength of parasocial interactions, as such behavior is perceived as emotionally engaging by the fans and leads them to look forward for further communications. Lueck (2015) stated that celebrity's personal social media posts engage the followers through the illusion of intimacy, as the followers are addressed by the celebrity as their own friends; such an approach creates stronger parasocial interactions with the followers. Lueck (2015) stated that celebrities provide lifestyle guidance to their followers as followers are searching for advice on how to obtain the desired lifestyle, displayed by the celebrities on their social media. Such information is attentively observed by the followers and this increases engagement and strength of parasocial interactions with the celebrity. Escalas and Bettman (2017) state that consumers displaying high need to belong are more susceptible to celebrity's parasocial interactions.

1.5. Research structure

In chapter two of this thesis, literature review will examine two main topics. First topic will focus on celebrity endorsement and examine characteristics that different streams of literature attribute to a successful endorser. The second topic is focused on concepts in parasocial interactions theory that can shed the light on the mechanism of celebrity persuasion. In the end of the second chapter, synthesis of theoretical framework will be introduced. In the third chapter, research philosophy, research strategy, data generation and data analysis will be discussed. To enhance the understanding of the followers' logic, semi-structured interviews will explore core reasons why Russian Millennials follow endorsers on social media and the core reasons they purchase the endorsed products.

In the fourth chapter, research findings will be revealed and analyzed using the theoretical framework. Seven emerged themes regarding how parasocial interactions shape consumer buying behavior will be presented. Theoretical framework will be re-evaluated in the end of the fourth chapter, confirming or disputing elements of theories included in this research. The fifth chapter is dedicated to the discussion and the conclusions of this thesis. It will start with the summary of the research, then theoretical and practical contributions of this thesis will be discussed. The chapter will continue with acknowledging this research's limitations and suggesting further directions for the research dedicated to topics of parasocial interactions and celebrity endorsement.

2. PERSUADING CONSUMERS WITH CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENT

The literature review section will consist of two parts. First, literature review will focus on celebrity endorsement, including different streams of research addressing main characteristics of an effective endorser. Recent research in marketing exhibited tendencies to fill in the knowledge gap by looking at the celebrity endorsement through parasocial interactions theory. Parasocial interactions theory was chosen as an appropriate way to address celebrity endorsement, as this theory strives to understand audience's psychology and responsiveness to celebrity's influence. Second, literature review will elaborate on parasocial interactions and various drivers that increase their strength. Even though strength of parasocial interactions is viewed as a factor believed to increase purchase intentions, the exact role it plays in achieving so is unidentified (Chung & Cho, 2017). Thus, the second part of this literature review will examine what factors are determining the strength of parasocial interactions and, consequently, shaping consumers' buying behavior. Emerged theoretical framework will be presented in the concluding section of this chapter.

2.1. Main concepts in celebrity endorsement literature

In the content of this section of literature review, the decision was made to look for existing theoretical knowledge about mechanism of celebrity endorsement influence on consumers. Close attention was paid to the aspects of celebrity endorsers that were argued by the researchers to potentially lead to increased consumers' purchase intentions. Celebrity endorsement is described as a process of celebrity utilizing his/her public recognition in product promotion by appearing with the product in an advertisement (McCracken, 1989). Higher level of perceived credibility can be obtained by utilizing celebrity endorsement as a marketing strategy (Spry, Pappu & Cornwell, 2011). To reflect on the nature of celebrity endorsement and its role in marketing, Erdogan (1999) distinguished several benefits of endorsement using a celebrity.

First of all, Erdogan (1999) argues that celebrity attracts greater attention to the product, in turn increasing consumers' awareness, as consumers tend to recognize celebrity-endorsed products on the shelf while shopping. Secondly, celebrity can play a role of a

spokesperson for the company and similarly increase consumers' awareness, as well as create a positive image for the company in the public eye. Additionally, companies can use a celebrity in new product promotion by utilizing the public recognition celebrity already has and transferring it to the new product. Celebrity's recognition increases the probability that consumers will try the new product, even though they are not guaranteed to like it, however, consumers are willing to take this risk, since they trust the celebrity (Erdogan, 1999). This can be compared to a friend's recommendation that can make individuals more willing to experiment and step outside their consumption comfort zone. This notion is in line with Millennials' openness for experimenting with the consumer products, especially if they are recommended by their friends (Fromm & Garton, 2013).

2.1.1. McCracken's Meaning Transfer Model (1989)

The researchers offer different reasons to why companies employ celebrities in promotion and what is the mechanism of celebrity endorsement's persuasion on consumers. The Meaning Transfer Model suggests that by acquiring the endorsed product, consumers believe to come into possession of an object that enables them to obtain certain celebrity's qualities that are emphasized in an advertisement (McCracken, 1989). The author explains that consumers tend to think of celebrities as successful people and believe that these qualities transfer to the products that celebrities endorse. To analyze the mechanism of celebrity endorsement in-depth, McCracken (1989) introduced his own model, that consists of three distinct phases.

During the first phase, celebrities are transferred meanings from the objects, persons and context they encounter during their public career. These meanings then become celebrity's own attributes and can be further transferred to the product. Celebrities' attributes can create distinct meanings for the endorsed product (McCracken, 1989). During the first phase, celebrities represent cultural meanings and certain personal characteristic that they acquired in the eye of the public during the course of their career. During the second phase, these cultural meanings and personal characteristics are transferred to the product in the process of endorsement. Lastly, during the third stage, these meanings and characteristics are transferred to the final consumer (McCracken, 1989). Meaning Transfer Model is helpful for addressing the research purpose as it fully analyzes the process of consumers' assigning and extracting meanings from celebrity-endorsed products.

It is argued that in the modern Western society, the emphasis is made on the individual's right to choose (Belk, 1984). It is noted that such institutions as family, the church and the community no longer provide individuals with self-definition and self-meaning. This way, individuals are free to identify meanings of personality and lifestyle for themselves. Belk (1984) argues that freedom of identification drives individuals to search for symbolic meanings in the product consumption. McCracken's explanation of the mechanism of celebrity endorsement is in line with the recent research findings suggesting that consumers utilize aspects of symbolic meanings of celebrity-endorsed products to "construct and communicate their self-concepts" (Escalas & Bettman, 2017: 297). The authors argue that consumers display different levels of the need to belong. Those consumers that showcase high levels of this need, are more likely to pay close attention to the celebrities, since they are seeking celebrity's guidance about what labels can fulfill this need. Need to belong is utilized as one of the components of this thesis' theoretical framework. It plays a role in addressing the research purpose, as it shows one of the reasons why followers choose to engage in parasocial interactions.

McCracken (1989) discusses this notion and argues that seeking celebrity's guidance is especially prominent in the third stage of meaning transfer. Consumers are constantly searching for products that offer them desired meanings. Consumers utilize these meanings to enhance themselves and the environment they live in, thus another reason for the product consumption is personal transformation and creation of the more suitable environment. In the third phase, meanings are transferred from product to consumer (McCracken, 1989). It is notable that the product's meaning does not automatically transfers to the consumers simply because they own it. It is necessary for the consumers to intentionally assimilate this meaning in the process of using the product (McCracken, 1989).

During the third phase of meaning transfer, celebrities have to represent a prominent function (McCracken, 1989). During the first phase, they created their distinct personal characteristics through their public career. These characteristics are often found to be inspirational and are admired by the public. As consumers at this stage are looking to gather these characteristics from the product, they look up to the celebrity, as celebrities are the individuals who already are in the possession of these characteristics that consumers try to obtain (McCracken, 1989). Celebrities are offering these characteristics to the consumers in the form of the endorsed products. Additionally, celebrity endorsers are suggesting guidance for personal transformation by representing a role model to the consumers (McCracken, 1989). Celebrities represent successful, powerful individuals that consumers strive to become.

Celebrity endorsers' role is to demonstrate how meaning and personal characteristics are obtained from the product and integrated to one's personality. McCracken calls celebrities "key players" in the meaning transfer process (McCracken, 1989: 318). This stage of the meaning transfer is particularly relevant to the social media endorsements, since in many promotional videos it is possible to see celebrity or influencer utilizing the product, thus, guiding consumers through the process of obtaining these meanings from the product.

Research suggests that consumers displaying high need to belong were susceptible to celebrity's parasocial interactions; these interactions were argued to serve as a mediator factor in endorsement's influence on consumers' association between self-concept and the brand (Escalas & Bettman, 2017). Similarly, during the second phase of the Meaning Transfer Model, the author emphasizes the importance to utilize people, objects and context that highlight the necessary celebrity meanings in the advertisement, as they guide consumers towards comprehending this meaning (McCracken, 1989). The author pinpoints that in order for the second phase to be successful, it is necessary that consumers grasp the association between the product and the celebrity. At the end of this phase, consumers acknowledge that the product possesses celebrity's meaning and characteristics, emphasized in the advertisement (McCracken, 1989). By taking these notions into account, it becomes possible to conclude that consumers with high levels of the need to belong seek to buy products from the company that celebrity they identify with endorse for, since parasocial interactions lead them to believe that if this product is suitable for this celebrity, it is suitable for them as well.

In contrast to these notions, the article revealed that consumers that displayed lower levels of a need to belong (and were irresponsive to parasocial interactions with the endorser), displayed higher need to distinguish a connection between celebrity endorser's and brand's images (Escalas & Bettman, 2017). Similar to this notion, McCracken (1989) suggests that during the second stage of meaning-transfer, it is necessary for the marketing team to decide what meaning consumers are looking for in the type of product the company is about to promote. When this meaning is determined, it is advised to evaluate what current celebrities are able to offer such meaning to the endorsed product. The next step for the company is to decide which celebrity possesses the closest suitable meaning (McCracken,1989). In the product's advertisement, it is essential to capture the meaning from the celebrity and successfully transfer it to the product, this way the consumer is able to establish an association between product and celebrity. The advertisement needs to clearly communicate the necessary meaning, while leaving out other unrelated meanings the celebrity might possess (McCracken, 1989). These

recommendations are in line with celebrity endorsement literature's notion about the match-up hypothesis, that will be discussed in the next section of this literature review.

Important notion in endorsement's effectiveness is whether celebrity or non-celebrity endorser is chosen for the promotion. It is noted by the research that celebrities have the unique ability to carry distinct cultural meanings, while non-celebrity endorsers cannot (McCracken, 1989). In terms of what kind of social media endorsements are more efficient, with the use of celebrity or social media influencer, recent research was done in 2017 and it revealed interesting findings. Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) concluded that female followers on Instagram viewed social media influencers as more persuading towards final purchase versus publicly recognized celebrities. In contrast to this logic, the Meaning Transfer Model suggests that because celebrities carry powerful cultural meanings, they are able to offer more distinct consumer messages, than non-celebrity advertisement actors (McCracken, 1989). However, the author makes a point that non-celebrity endorsers are capable of creation of certain meanings as well as transferring them to the product through the process of advertisement.

McCracken (1989) claims that celebrities are more valuable endorsers than non-celebrities. While non-celebrities communicate such aspects as gender, age and situation, celebrities, in addition to these, offer precise cultural meanings and personality traits. Another important point made by the author is that celebrities contain unique arrangement of meanings that are not possible to duplicate. Celebrities are seen as genuine representors of cultural meanings, while non-celebrities are only portraying these meanings in advertising (McCracken, 1989). It has been noted ever since the early celebrity endorsement research that use of widely recognized celebrity, such as Hollywood actor, moderates the cultural barriers allowing the company to efficiently transition to the international market (Erdogan, 1999). As in this thesis it was decided to not make a distinction between public figures with high and low level of public recognition and refer to all of them simply as "celebrity endorser", celebrity/non-celebrity factor will not be included in the theoretical framework.

2.1.2. Source effect in celebrity endorsement literature

McCracken (1989) introduced his Meaning Transfer Model in response to source attractiveness and source credibility models, that combined together referred to as source effect models. In celebrity endorsement literature, source effect is the concept that describes what

features of the source (endorser) positively influence perception of the endorser's communication by the consumer audience. Main models of source effectiveness include the match-up hypotheses (Kamins, 1990), the Source Attractiveness Model (McGuire, 1985) and the Source Credibility Model (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). According to these models, celebrity-brand fit as well as different characteristics of the endorser are emphasized as the most important factors during attempts to persuade the consumers. These models include such characteristics, as trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness of the endorser.

Pointed out by Erdogan (1999), certain celebrity characteristics can be unsuitable, unrelated, and harmful. McCormick (2016) stated that companies should be extremely thoughtful in choosing who represents their product, as their choice of celebrity will determine the success of the endorsement, thus, celebrity must be chosen to match the image of the product. However, the level of celebrity's fame might represent a risk for the endorsed product. Celebrity must be recognized by the public, but if the celebrity is too prominent, this might shift the attention focus towards the celebrity, by taking it away from the product itself (McCormick, 2016). Such negative effect has been noticed by several researchers and coined as "the vampire effect" (Erfgen, Zenker & Sattler, 2015; Karlíček & Kuvita, 2014). Another celebrity endorsement research was focused on studying how public image of celebrity can affect image of the product. Research findings revealed that celebrity's scandals play a negative role for the company's image and it is not uncommon for the company to end the contract with the celebrity endorser to disassociate from the undesirable reputation that might be damaging for the company (White, Goddard & Wilbur, 2009). These notions are important to consider while addressing the research purpose, as they help to understand which celebrity's characteristics are perceived as beneficial to the process of celebrity endorsements and which are considered as harmful.

However, conflicting research findings suggest that celebrity with a negative public image can increase purchase intentions of consumers (Sääksjärvi, Hellén & Balabanis, 2016). In the article, the authors elaborate on the aspects of source attractiveness that were defined in the context of both psychological attractiveness and physical appearance of the endorser. Celebrities with an attractive public image negatively affected consumers' self-esteem, while celebrities with negative, unattractive public reputation had positive impact on consumers' self-esteem and, consequently, lead to increased purchase intentions. Additionally, brand evaluations were negatively affected by celebrities with attractive public image (Sääksjärvi, Hellén & Balabanis, 2016).

17

Three main components (familiarity, likability, similarity) constitute source attractiveness (McGuire, 1985). Ohanian (1990) stated that the more consumer evaluates endorser as attractive, the more effective is endorser's persuasion. It is important to point out that source attractiveness model is not solely focuses on endorser's physical appearance, but takes into account personality characteristics, lifestyle and endorser's talents (Erdogan, 1999). Likability includes such characteristics as physical appearance, behavior, personality. It has been revealed that physical appearance, however, is an important characteristic of the endorser, as people tend to make their first judgement of an individual based on it (Kahle & Homer, 1985). Attractiveness serves as one of the components of this thesis' theoretical framework, influencing both celebrity endorsement's effectiveness, as well as the strength of parasocial interactions.

In Kahle and Homer's (1985) study, it was revealed that endorsers with higher level of perceived physical attractiveness generated higher level of consumers' buying intentions. In line with these findings, consumers exhibited positive stereotypes about endorsers with perceived high level of physical attractiveness (Erdogan, 1999). Research suggests that physical attractiveness serves as a persuasive factor even for products not related to beauty enhancement (Praxmarer, 2011). It is important to point out that in their managerial implications section, Sääksjärvi, Hellén and Balabanis (2016) suggested that companies should thoroughly examine their target market; in certain circumstances it might be the best option to select unattractive celebrity for the endorsement. Such a decision can be reasoned as safer, since participant findings show that consumers with low self-esteem react better to celebrity endorsement with unattractive celebrity. On the other hand, exposure to attractive and unattractive celebrities played no effect on purchase intentions of consumers with high self-esteem (Sääksjärvi, Hellén & Balabanis, 2016).

Familiarity is viewed as perceived knowledge of endorser that allows consumers to feel more comfortable with previously encountered source, as well as be more responsive to the endorser's persuasion attempts. Russell and Stern (2006) pointed out that level of familiarity with the endorser correlates with more positive perceived company attitude. Similarity is consumer's perceived resemblance with endorser (Erdogan, 1999). Other researchers argued that persuasiveness of endorser is higher if the consumer evaluates endorser as similar to them (Kahle & Homer, 1985). Research suggests that similar individuals exhibit tendencies for interpersonal trust, understanding and attraction (Ruef, Aldrich & Carter, 2013). Additionally, consumers look for similarity in endorsers' lifestyle and activities and if they find it, endorsers' communication messages are evaluated as more cohesive by the consumers (Erdogan, 1999).

This way, the companies are motivated to utilize endorsers that represent their target consumer, as similarity between them can enhance the persuasiveness of the source. Familiarity and similarity serve as components of the theoretical framework regarding effectiveness of the celebrity endorser. It is notable that similarity is identified by the parasocial interactions theory as a factor leading to stronger parasocial interactions as well.

It is noteworthy that effect of attractiveness/unattractiveness factor for celebrities displayed an opposite pattern for non-celebrities (Sääksjärvi, Hellén & Balabanis, 2016). Attractive non-celebrities increase consumers' self-esteem, while unattractive non-celebrities decrease it. The authors argued that difference in influence mechanism might be caused by the level of public exposure, that plays a significant role in participants' evaluations. High levels of fame were argued by the authors to lead to extreme emotional reactions, both positive and negative, on behalf of the respondents (Sääksjärvi, Hellén & Balabanis, 2016).

The other branch of celebrity endorsement literature emphasizes celebrity's credibility as the main factor determining effectiveness of endorser's message; celebrity endorser's perceived trustworthiness and perceived expertise are the determining factors of influence as established in the source credibility model (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Trustworthiness is defined as endorser's believability and honesty. Level of credibility determines how promotional message is accepted by the consumer. Message from the credible source impacts attitudes and behavior of consumers by affecting consumers' values and opinions (Erdogan, 1999). However, Ohanian (1991) argued that endorser's trustworthiness is not a factor influencing consumers' decision to purchase the product. Trustworthiness and expertise were included in theoretical framework as factors determining effectiveness of the celebrity endorser.

Expertise is distinguished as another factor that determines endorsement's success. Celebrity endorser's perceived expertise is defined as the level measuring validity of one's skill in a certain area (Erdogan, 1999). Expertise is described as perceived qualification of endorser to express valid assertions (McCracken, 1989). Ohanian (1991) argued that out of all source aspects, expertise is the most prominent one as expertise has the most correlation with the purchase intentions. In contrast, Amos, Holmes and Strutton (2008) argue that consumer's attitude is influenced less by source expertise and more by the source trustworthiness. Chung and Cho (2017) argue that since endorser's expertise is not even required in some endorsements, this leads to increase in significance of the endorser's trustworthiness. Ohanian (1990) suggests that actual expertise does not play a role in celebrity endorsement, however, consumers must believe that celebrity endorser is an expert, thus only creating this perception is necessary.

Kamins *et al.* (1989) researched difference in consumer's perceived endorsement credibility based on one-sided or two-sided remarks about the product. One-sided endorsement is defined as celebrity endorser's presentation of the product as having no drawbacks. On the other hand, two-sided endorsement is a presentation of the product that includes both positive and negative remarks about the product. Kamins *et al.* (1989) concluded that two-sided celebrity endorsement was perceived as more credible and significantly more effective, with high consumer-perceived quality of the product.

Differently from the source credibility literature, Spry, Pappu and Cornwell (2011) include celebrity attractiveness as one of the building blocks of credibility. The authors argue that celebrity endorsers' credibility depends on three characteristics: trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness. The authors pinpoint endorser's credibility as a factor directly influencing brand credibility, that, in turn, influences brand equity evaluation by the consumers. However, research findings revealed that endorsers who possess low credibility, still can promote the brand (Spry *et al.,* 2011). The authors point out that an advertisement in celebrity endorsement communicates incomplete product information, leading to asymmetric information for consumers. This asymmetry can be decreased by the brand credibility, that builds consumers' assurance and reduces perceived product risks (Spry *et al.,* 2011).

It is possible to argue that social media influencers typically exhibit extensive knowledge of certain specialized field and this leads their followers to view them as experts in that field. When the influencer is collaborating with the product related to their specialized knowledge, it is perceived with trust by the followers (Hall, 2016). In case the endorsed product does not relate to the influencer's area of expertise, this might be perceived as not authentic by the followers and causes loss of followers' trust. This notion is in line with previous research findings suggesting that consumers' purchase decisions are positively affected if endorser's perceived expertise lies in the same area that the product is related to (Ohanian, 1991).

Match-up hypothesis maintains that success of the endorsement is determined by the level of the product-endorser congruence (Kamins, 1990). Aaker (1997) argues that endorser with an expertise directly related to the endorsed product has a high level of perceived persuasion. Match-up hypothesis was utilized in the recent study by McCormick (2016). The researcher examined whether a match between endorser and the promoted product increased Millennials' purchase intentions. The findings reveled that Millennials did not exhibit purchase intentions towards the products endorsed by the celebrity they did not know. However,

Theoretical element	Short description and authors
Meanings	Meaning Transfer Model (McCracken, 1989) consists of three stages. In first stage, meanings are transferred from persons, objects and context to celebrities. In second stage, personal characteristics and cultural meanings are transferred from celebrities to the products. In third stage, meanings and characteristics are obtained by final consumers through the process of using the product.
Associations	System of nodes, representing separate fragments of information are linked to each other by associations and together they constitute consumer's memory (Till & Shimp, 1998). Till (1998) states that consumers can unintentionally associate celebrity endorser with a brand, as well as the brand with the celebrity endorser.
Motives to endorse	Chung and Cho's (2017) paper, stating that consumers are evaluating whether endorser promotes the product only for personal gains, or he/she genuinely likes it.
Fit with the product	Match-up hypothesis attributes endorsement's success to the level of the product-endorser congruence (Kamins, 1990).
Trustworthiness	Celebrity endorser's perceived trustworthiness and perceived expertise are the determining factors of influence as established in the source credibility model (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Trustworthiness is defined as endorser's believability and honesty.
Expertise	Celebrity endorser's perceived expertise is defined as the level measuring validity of one's skill in a certain area (Erdogan, 1999). Additionally, expertise is described as perceived qualification of an endorser to express valid assertions (McCracken, 1989).
Attractiveness	Three main components (familiarity, likability, similarity) constitute source attractiveness (McGuire, 1985). In Kahle and Homer's (1985) study, it was revealed that endorsers with higher level of perceived physical attractiveness generated higher level of consumer's buying intentions. Consumers exhibited positive stereotypes about endorsers with perceived high level of physical attractiveness (Erdogan, 1999).
Likability	Source attractiveness model is not solely focused on endorser's physical appearance, but takes into account personality characteristics, lifestyle and endorser's talents (Erdogan, 1999). Likability includes such characteristics as physical appearance, behavior, personality.

Similarity	Similarity is consumer's perceived resemblance with the endorser (Erdogan, 1999). It is argued that persuasiveness of the endorser is higher if consumers evaluate this endorser as similar to them (Kahle & Homer, 1985).
Familiarity	Russell and Stern (2006) pointed out that the level of familiarity with the endorser correlates with more positive perceived attitude towards the company. Familiarity is viewed as a perceived knowledge of the endorser that allows consumers to feel more comfortable with previously encountered source, as well as to be more responsive to the endorser's persuasion attempts.

Table 1. Elements of the theoretical framework (celebrity endorsement).

Millennials showed favorable attitude towards the advertisements that utilized unfamiliar celebrity (McCormick, 2016). These findings lead to the argument that Millennials show responsiveness to all celebrity advertising, however, in order to influence their purchase decisions, it is necessary to utilize celebrities that they know. Celebrity endorser's fit with the product is utilized in the theoretical framework, as it allows to analyze if parasocial interactions can influence consumers' behavior, particularly, whether consumers buy unrelated to celebrity products only because they emotionally attached to this celebrity.

Even though parasocial influence on brand perceptions is not studied in this thesis, Associative Network Memory Model provides relevant information that can be utilized in analyzation of the interview findings, as associations that can be built between celebrity and a brand can also be built between celebrity and a product. Associations are represented in the theoretical framework; together with the meanings they contribute to links between endorser, product and consumer. Endorsers with high level of perceived credibility are able to transfer it to the brand they represent (Spry *et al.,* 2011). System of nodes, representing separate fragments of information are linked to each other by associations and together they constitute consumer's memory (Till & Shimp, 1998). By activating one such node, other nodes, linked to the activated node by association, also activate (Spry *et al.,* 2011). This notion is utilized to describe mechanism of association in consumer's mind. Till (1998) states that consumers can unintentionally associate celebrity endorser with a brand, as well as the brand with the celebrity endorser, and this association is an important aspect to consider while promoting the company's image and maximizing brand's equity.

This way, the brand and the celebrity endorser can be viewed as interlinked nodes in Associative Network Memory Model (Till & Shimp, 1998). Research suggests that celebrity endorsements influence consumers to remember the product better, since it is advertised by memorable celebrity. Hence, the association between celebrity and endorsed product keeps these products in consumers' minds while they are shopping and leads to visual recognition of these products (Kelting & Rice, 2013). Similar to these notion, Associative Network Memory Model was utilized in Spry, Pappu and Cornwell (2011) study to conclude that using celebrity endorsement positively contributes to the company's promotion by increasing brand awareness, brand associations, brand loyalty as well as perceived quality of brand's products. All these elements are represented in the theoretical framework as possible outcomes of celebrity endorsement's influence on consumers.

2.2. Addressing celebrity endorsement with parasocial interactions theory

This section of literature review will explore the nature of parasocial interactions and show how understanding of such interactions can be beneficially employed in celebrity endorsements, by increasing their persuasive effect. Parasocial interactions theory was established by Horton and Wohl in 1956, and it is focused on studying relationships between media personas and the audience. These relationships are essentially one-sided in nature (Giles, 2002). Parasocial interactions can be explained as one-sided imaginary friendships between the audience and the celebrities that appear as a result of the audience's exposure to these celebrities through TV viewing, analyzing their personalities and the actions that celebrities undertake on the screen. One-sided nature of parasocial interactions does not prevent followers from viewing the celebrity to be a person that they actually know, just as real-life friends (Tian & Hoffner, 2010).

2.2.1. Foundations of parasocial interactions theory

As Horton and Wohl (1956) point out, constant exposure to the media figure causes development of parasocial interactions and creates identification as well as imaginary

friendship with that figure, together with establishing a sense of emotional intimacy. This exposure manifests itself in the audience's belief that they personally know these celebrities (Perse & Rubin, 1989). Marwick and Boyd (2011) made an important point about the differences in relationship perception between celebrities and their followers. It has been argued that celebrities do not know about the existence of individual followers or their identities, thus cannot perceive them as friends. However, the followers do perceive the celebrity as their friend. It is suggested that parasocial interactions occur because the audience finds similarities between the personal characteristics of themselves and the celebrities that they see on the screen (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Main aspects of parasocial interactions distinguished in the original theory are identification, understanding and friendship (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Giles (2002) suggests that realism of a media figure is a factor predicting development of parasocial interactions. The author points out that viewers showcase higher levels of parasocial interactions with realistic media personas, such as celebrities, in comparison to fictional characters, like sitcom characters.

Horton and Wohl (1956) outlined understanding as followers' belief that they personally and deeply know the media figure. Viewers who believe that they know the celebrity, empathize with him/her and think that they understand his/her actions and motives. Such belief is caused by acquired through the regular viewing knowledge of the media persona and familiarity with him/her (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Russell and Stern (2006) pointed out that familiarity and parasocial emotional attachment are interconnected and lead followers with strong attachment to evaluate the person that they follow to be a significant individual in their life. Chung and Cho (2017) propose that interactions between celebrities and followers on social media are associated with source trustworthiness. Authors argue that through regular interactions on social media, followers collect abundant information that is used to determine how much they trust a certain celebrity.

Frequency is one of the amplifiers of parasocial interactions (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Frequency can be described as an aspect measuring how often followers interact with or seek to find more information about a celebrity. The authors argue that the amount of time followers spend observing the celebrity on television is correlated with the strength of their parasocial interactions (Horton & Wohl, 1956). In line with the original theory, recent research suggests that frequency serves as a measure of the strength of parasocial interaction (Kassing & Sanderson, 2009). Researchers investigated how strength of parasocial interactions is contingent with the frequency of interactions. Overall finding suggests that higher frequency results in stronger parasocial interactions (Kassing & Sanderson, 2009). Other research suggests

that frequency of contact with media characters is proportional to the level of parasocial interactions developed (Turner, 1993). Similarly, frequency of television viewing was found to be a factor leading to stronger parasocial interactions (Perse & Rubin, 1989). Recently, researchers pointed out that constant following of celebrity further develops parasocial interactions and leads followers to view these media personas as their friends (Stern, Russell & Russell, 2007).

Identification is another important amplifier of parasocial interactions. Cohen (2001) defines identification with the media persona as taking on his/her perspective, thus the viewer is imagining himself/herself to be that persona. Additionally, wishful identification is distinguished as one of the outcomes of parasocial interactions by several researchers; it can be defined as viewer's desire to resemble media persona and have certain characteristics that they possess (Moyer-Guse, 2008). Hoffner and Buchanan (2005) argue that viewer's wishful identification with media personas are caused by their characteristics, such as humor, attractiveness, strength and intelligence. Cohen (2001) views identification with media figures as a result of strong emotional attachment to them. Other research pointed out that parasocial interactions arise from identification with media personas and interest in them, as well as their problem-solving abilities (Auter & Palmgreen, 2000). Research outcomes suggest that identification with the group was the variable most correlated with the media consumption. Additionally, media persona's problem-solving skills were found to be correlated with media consumption as well (Auter & Palmgreen, 2000).

Self-disclosure is another factor that contributes to stronger parasocial interactions. Research points out that parasocial interactions are improved by fan's perceived social presence of the celebrity caused by their self-disclosure (Kim & Song, 2016). Original theory pinpoints that media personas that communicate with their fans in an intimate, personal way, are able to increase the level of parasocial interactions, as such behavior influences fans to look forward for further communication with these media personas (Horton & Wohl, 1956). It can be argued that in the modern context, nature of social media calls for high level of self-disclosure, which, in turn, increases fans' emotional engagement with celebrity, consequently leading to stronger parasocial interactions. Social media's celebrity communication with their fans can be viewed as self-disclosive due to personal posts, such as photos with friends and family, exclusive information and revealing details of everyday life; celebrity-fan communication on social media is perceived as engaging and personal due to the nature of posted content (Marwick & Boyd, 2011).

Another factor the authors distinguish as increasing the strength of parasocial interactions is the level of perceived similarity the followers recognize between themselves and the celebrity (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Several researchers focused on perceived similarity as a factor leading to parasocial interactions. Researchers noted that followers notice similarities with celebrities and start to identify with them personally (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). Tian & Hoffner (2010) agree that the level of perceived similarities increases the strength of parasocial interactions for the follower; authors point out that if the viewers perceive TV characters' personal beliefs and attitudes as similar to theirs, they are likely to engage in parasocial interactions with them. Turner (1993) discussed similarity as well, but in his research, he refers to it as homophily. He suggested that homophily is another factor playing role in parasocial interactions, it is defined as viewer's perception of similarity with the media persona. He discussed three aspects of homophily: appearance, attitude and background. Out of these aspects, similarity in attitude was proven to have strongest correlation with development of parasocial interactions (Turner, 1993).

High celebrity attractiveness leads to better performance of products (Kahle & Homer, 1985). Research suggested that consumers tend to show high level of involvement with the celebrities with high level of attractiveness; celebrities with high level of attractiveness were more likely to attract consumers' attention as well as change their attitudes towards a product. Similar to the notion of attractiveness in celebrity endorsement, another factor predicting stronger parasocial interactions is high level of attraction to media persona (Turner, 1993). The author included attractiveness in perceived similarities category and stated that media personas' high level of attractiveness causes viewers to pay close attention to them.

Parasocial interactions theory originated during the time when television became popular, thus, most of the literature on the subject has been written based on the assumption that parasocial interactions occur between the audience and the television characters. Researchers recognized that TV viewers obtain emotional gratification from parasocial interactions and that they tended to engage in further parasocial interactions in order to pursue such gratification (Horton & Wohl, 1956). However, since the emergence of social media, literature has started to address the topic of parasocial interactions taking place on the social media platform. Moreover, emergence of social media ultimately altered the ways in which fans and celebrities interact with one another (Kwon & Wen, 2010). There is a need to further study and apply parasocial interactions to the modern context, particularly to social media marketing and celebrity endorsement. Social media provides a unique opportunity for building closer relationships between celebrities and their followers, since nowadays celebrities are able

to personally respond to the comments left on their social pages. Parasocial interactions can become more authentic and intimate on social media because followers see the information posted by the celebrities themselves and not by a particular media source, thus without altering the information to fit that source's publishing standards.

Celebrity newsrooms, such as TMZ, and celebrity gossip magazines, such as People or U.S. Weekly, are no longer the only and primary source of celebrity news, since social media took their place. Because social media allows reciprocal communication between followers and celebrities, it can potentially provide an opportunity for more intense parasocial interactions. Additionally, as social media allows followers to receive updates from celebrities themselves, this leads followers to feel stronger emotional ties as the information is shared in the more personal manner, comparable to how real-life friends communicate with each other. Marwick and Boyd (2011) pointed out that celebrities feel more relatable to followers, since they post in a casual manner, with spelling errors and slang in their posts, as well as direct address and use of first-person perspective.

In modern days, celebrities are putting an effort in communicating with their fans on social media. Mariah Carey is known for communicating with her fans via direct messages on Twitter (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). Possibility to participate in celebrity-initiated discussions on social media, as well as a chance to receive a personal message from favorite celebrity is thrilling for the followers and can be a stimulating factor for continuing involvement as an active follower of celebrity. Ballantine and Martin (2004) pointed out that consistent exposure to media personas, particularly to ones that address the viewers personally with the use of informal conversations, causes viewers to emotionally attach to these personas and regularly watch them on the TV screen, which further increases dedication to following this media personas.

2.2.2. Analyzing how parasocial interactions enhance endorsement's effectiveness

Influence of parasocial interactions on effectiveness of the celebrity endorsement have not been thoroughly explored in the marketing research literature. However, several research articles attempted to shed the light on this influence and suggested that parasocial interactions lead to consumers' improved perception of celebrity endorsement. Important point made by

Horton and Wohl's in their original article, that is of particular interest to this thesis' research purpose, is celebrities' ability to influence the behavior of their followers through parasocial interactions. Horton and Wohl (1956) were the first to propose that celebrities have a unique ability to promote products to TV viewers. The authors made an important point that the information the celebrities are sharing must be evaluated by the viewers to be authentic. Another important argument the authors made, is that followers must perceive celebrities as relatable, thus, exhibiting likeness to the viewers by their behaviors and attitudes. It is recommended by Horton and Wohl (1956) that celebrities advertise products to their fans by suggesting that obtaining these products will allow them to gain further similarity with these celebrities. The authors state that the act of purchasing celebrity-endorsed products leads to the strengthening of parasocial interactions. Therefore, Horton and Wohl (1956) distinguish strong parasocial interactions to be a potent tool for generating income for companies.

In the article by Lueck (2015), the author examines the way in which celebrity Kim Kardashian addresses her audience on social media. Lueck (2015) suggests that parasocial interactions indeed took place in Kardashian's communication efforts. Additionally, the author points out that as currently celebrity endorsements take place on social media, marketing research needs to further examine this phenomenon to obtain a better understanding of the mechanism behind the celebrities' powerful influence on their followers. Similarly, Labreque (2014) points out that companies can find value in parasocial interactions, based on the evidence that such interactions can increase consumer's brand loyalty. Perse and Rubin (1989) point out that persuasive effect of parasocial interactions is based on their ability to reduce viewer's uncertainty.

In her article, Lueck (2015) analyzed how Kim Kardashian used personal stories to promote the endorsed products, as such stories produced an emotional appeal on her followers. The author states that celebrity's personal social media posts engage the followers through the parasocial interactions and an illusion of intimacy, which is utilized by the celebrity to better sell the endorsed product. Lueck (2015) explains that the celebrity, who is perceived as a trusted source, by incorporating personal stories about her own experience with the product, makes the product worthier in the eyes of the followers. Additionally, Lueck (2015) points out that Kim Kardashian interacted with her followers in the same way that she would talk to her real friends, and by doing so, created stronger parasocial interactions with the followers.

Lueck (2015) suggests that celebrities act as lifestyle gurus and the followers are willing to buy the items they endorse in order to obtain the desired lifestyle, displayed by the

celebrities on their social media. This way, celebrity endorsements are not perceived with negativity by the followers, but instead are attentively observed by them as a valuable information. Another insightful point made by Lueck (2015) is a notion that since the infant years, boys are known to be interested in objects around them, while girls are more interested in people; this notion leads the author to conclude that, possibly, it is more common for females than males to develop parasocial interactions. In line with that notion, research suggests that females are more prone to developing parasocial interactions with media personas, and such interactions are more emotionally intense for females (Cohen, 2003). These findings are relevant to this thesis' research purpose, as female respondents are interviewed.

Chung and Cho (2017) analyzed online celebrity-follower interactions as well. The authors argue that celebrity-follower communication on social media platform leads to stronger connection, identification and emotional intimacy between them, as well as follower' perceived friendship with the celebrity. The authors suggest that stronger parasocial interactions are built by the regular social media interactions, full of exclusive celebrity news and personal life updates. Similarly, Labrecque (2014) states that the level of parasocial interactions between a consumer and a brand is increased by consumer-brand social media exchanges, if consumer recognized such exchanges to be genuine.

It is suggested that followers engage in parasocial interactions, that consequently lead them to buy celebrity-endorsed products (Ballantine & Martin, 2005). Ballantine and Martin (2005) argued that fans tend to purchase the same items that celebrities they are found of, use. Horton and Wohl (1956) were the first to pinpoint this behavioral pattern in their original theory. This is in line with recent research's suggestion that celebrity endorsement heavily relies on parasocial interactions to promote the product (Chung & Cho, 2017). Similarly to these arguments, another recent article points out that emotional attachment to the celebrity positively affects followers' decision to buy the product (Kowalzcyk & Pounders, 2016).

By taking parasocial interactions' influence into account, it can be concluded that if followers see social media celebrities as friends, followers will listen to their product recommendations and buy these products, as if their real-life friends suggested it to them. Marketing research suggests that people who publicly approve the product on social media are influencing others towards purchasing this product. As a result, people encourage others to buy and, in turn, the product increases its popularity by word of mouth (Lipsman *et al.,* 2012). One's online friends can influence purchase decision directly by conformity, this way individuals buy the same product suggested to them by their peers (Wang, Chunling & Wei, 2012).

Theoretical element	Short description and authors
Similarity	Authors distinguish level of perceived similarity the followers recognize between themselves and the celebrity as increasing the strength of parasocial interactions (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Tian & Hoffner (2010) agree that the level of perceived similarities increases the strength of parasocial interactions for the follower. The authors point out that if the viewers perceive TV characters' personal beliefs and attitudes as similar to theirs, they are likely to engage in parasocial interactions with them.
Identification	Identification is one of the aspects of parasocial interactions. Cohen (2001) defines identification with the media persona as taking on his/her perspective, thus the viewer is imagining himself/herself to be that persona. Hoffner and Buchanan (2005) argue that viewer's wishful identification with media personas are caused by their characteristics, such as humor, attractiveness, strength and intelligence.
Authenticity	Chung and Cho (2017) stated that viewing endorser as authentic and believing that they promote the product not only for their own financial gains, leads to increased level of trust during parasocial interactions with the endorser.
Need to belong	Escalas and Bettman (2017) pointed out that parasocial interactions are connected to the need to belong that consumers fulfill by obtaining certain products endorsed by the celebrities that they follow.
Frequency of exposure	Frequency is one of the amplifiers of parasocial interactions (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Frequency can be described as an aspect measuring how often followers interact with or seek to find more information about a celebrity. The authors argue that the amount of time followers spend observing the celebrity on television is correlated with the strength of their parasocial interactions (Horton & Wohl, 1956).
Emotional attachment	Level of emotional attachment to celebrity in parasocial interactions leads followers to feel emotionally close to the celebrity, which consequently increases celebrity's persuasion on them (Russel & Stern, 2006).
Attractiveness	Turner (1993) stated that media personas' high level of attractiveness causes viewers to pay close attention to them.
Illusion of intimacy/personal knowledge	Lueck (2015) stated that celebrity's personal social media posts engage the followers through the illusion of intimacy, as the followers are addressed by the celebrity as their own friends. Such an approach leads followers to believe that they possess personal knowledge of celebrity and creates stronger parasocial interactions with the followers.

Self-disclosure	Research points out that parasocial interactions are improved by fans' perceived social presence of the celebrity caused by their self-disclosure (Kim & Song, 2016).
Trustworthiness	Chung and Cho (2017) argue that strong level of parasocial interactions can be developed from regular celebrity-follower interactions on social media. They state that social media-developed parasocial interactions increase endorser's trustworthiness, thus, have an important value for social media marketing.
Lifestyle guidance	Lueck (2015) stated that celebrities provide lifestyle guidance to their followers, as followers are searching for advice on how to obtain the desired lifestyle displayed by the celebrities on their social media. Such information is attentively observed by the followers and this increases engagement and strength of parasocial interactions with the media figure.

Table 2. Elements of the theoretical framework (parasocial interactions).

Additionally, there can be indirect influence that manifests itself in higher involvement with the product. However, researchers point out that peer conformity can be diminished by individual's need for uniqueness, this way consumer will not always purchase the product suggested by the peers (Wang, Chunling & Wei, 2012).

Recent research suggests that if consumer showcased high level of parasocial interactions with celebrity endorser, it led to positive attitude towards the endorsed product (Knoll *et al*., 2015). Parasocial interactions can also develop between consumer and a brand; such interactions increase likelihood of the consumer willingly sharing personal data with the brand, as well as develops brand loyalty (Labrecque, 2014). Level of emotional attachment to celebrity in parasocial interactions, leads followers to feel emotionally close to the celebrity, which consequently increases celebrity's persuasion on them (Russel & Stern, 2006). Authors point out that this attachment increases positive attitude towards the company by amplifying effectiveness of sitcom product placements. Kumar (2015) explored marketing evolution through the years and stated that positive effect of employing social media in product promotion can be accredited to the increase in consumer engagement. Most recent research suggests that parasocial identification increased consumer engagement with celebrity-endorsed product on Instagram and made celebrity-product image congruence less important (Phua, Lin & Lim, 2018).

In a recent article, Chung and Cho (2017) point out the importance of trustworthiness in celebrity endorsement. Authors define trustworthiness as having a faith that individuals are taking actions with not only their self-motives in mind. This can be applied to the celebrity endorsement context; followers want to be confident that endorser does not promote the product solely for the reason of personal financial gain, possibly knowingly endorsing low quality products. Chung and Cho (2017) argue that strong level of parasocial interactions can be developed from regular celebrity-follower interactions on social media. They state that social media-developed parasocial interactions increase endorser's trustworthiness, thus, have an important value for social media marketing. Since followers are aware that endorsers are promoting products for financial gains, this can lead to low level of trust in endorser's statements about these products. On the other hand, parasocial interactions can be viewed as the link through which celebrity-follower regular interactions on social media translate into higher level of source trustworthiness.

2.3. Synthesis of theoretical framework

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how parasocial interactions shape consumer behavior of Russian Millennials. The research gap was identified in the lack of knowledge about how parasocial interactions can be analyzed in the marketing context, particularly, how do parasocial interactions influence consumer behavior? Based on the previous research, it is possible to suggest that parasocial interactions undertaken by endorsers on social media positively effect followers' product perceptions and consequently lead to purchase intentions (Chung & Cho, 2017; Lueck, 2015). However, parasocial interactions role in consumer decision-making process has not yet been clearly defined (Chung & Cho, 2017).

Moreover, even though celebrity endorsement has been a subject of marketers' interest for a long time, its mechanism of persuasion has not been clearly defined and is essentially unexplained. To reach a deeper understanding of these processes, it is necessary to connect theoretical knowledge about celebrity endorsement with parasocial interactions, as well as to acknowledge the role that social media plays in parasocial interactions, making them more influential. Literature review examined articles about parasocial interactions, including articles analyzing parasocial interactions in marketing. Relevant factors from these articles were

utilized in the theoretical framework to showcase interactions between the endorser and the consumer.

In this theoretical framework, two main literature streams were combined in order to address the research purpose. First literature stream was examining the concept of celebrity endorsement, second literature stream dealt with parasocial interactions. In Figure 1, synthesis of theoretical framework is presented. It consists of three building blocks (endorser, product and consumer) and the links between them. Meaning Transfer Model (McCracken, 1989) provided the foundation for examining the research phenomenon. This model consists of three stages: in first stage, meanings are transferred from persons, objects and context to celebrities; in second stage, personal characteristics and cultural meanings are transferred from celebrities to the products; in third stage, meanings and characteristics are obtained by final consumers through the process of using the product (McCracken, 1989). This process of meaning transfer can be seen in the figure. Additionally, it was decided to add concept of associations from Associative Network Memory Model (Till & Shimp, 1998) in order to see if this concept will appear in respondents' answers and can be utilized in analyzing them.

Match-up hypothesis was reflected in the framework in fit with the product factor determining persuasiveness of the endorser. Match-up hypothesis attributes endorsement's success to the level of congruence between endorser and promoted product (Kamins, 1990). Source attractiveness and source credibility are two important celebrity endorsement literature streams that were examined to determine factors that consumers consider while evaluating persuasiveness of the endorser. Source attractiveness consists of three main components: familiarity, likability and similarity (McGuire, 1985). Source attractiveness model does not focus on endorser's physical appearance, but consists of personality characteristics, lifestyle and endorser's talents (Erdogan, 1999).

Source credibility model maintains that credibility of the celebrity serves as the main factor determining success of the endorsement; this model defines trustworthiness and expertise of the endorser to be main factors estimating endorser's credibility (Erdogan, 1999; Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Motives to endorse were added as a factor based on Chung and Cho's (2017) paper, stating that consumers are evaluating whether endorser promotes the product only for personal gains, or he/she genuinely likes it. In the figure, possible outcomes of celebrity influence on consumers are situated on the triangle's side between product and consumer; these outcomes include purchase intentions (Chung & Cho, 2017), attitude towards endorsement (Berquist *et. al,* 2016), brand awareness, brand associations, brand loyalty and perceived quality (Spry *et. al,* 2011).

Theoretical framework showcases interactions between the endorser and the consumer and pinpoints main factors determining strength of such interactions according to literature on parasocial interactions. These factors, combined with factors determining persuasiveness of endorser, will serve as building blocks for analysis of the findings. Parasocial interactions factors will be utilized in the process of distinguishing common themes in participants' consumer behavior. If these factors will be identified in participants' answers as influencing their consumer behavior, they will be used in the creation and analysis of the themes that they relate to.

Meanings Associations

PRODUCT

- **motives to endorse**
- **fit with the product**
- **trustworthiness**
- **expertise**
- **attractiveness**
- **likability**
- **similarity**
- **familiarity**

purchase intentions

attitude towards endorsement

brand awareness

brand associations

perceived quality

brand loyalty

Meanings Associations

Research purpose:

explore how parasocial interactions shape consumer behavior of Russian Millennials

ENDORSER

PARASOCIAL INTERACTIONS

CONSUMER

similarity   frequency of exposure   self-disclosure

identification   emotional attachment   trustworthiness

authenticity   attractiveness   lifestyle guidance

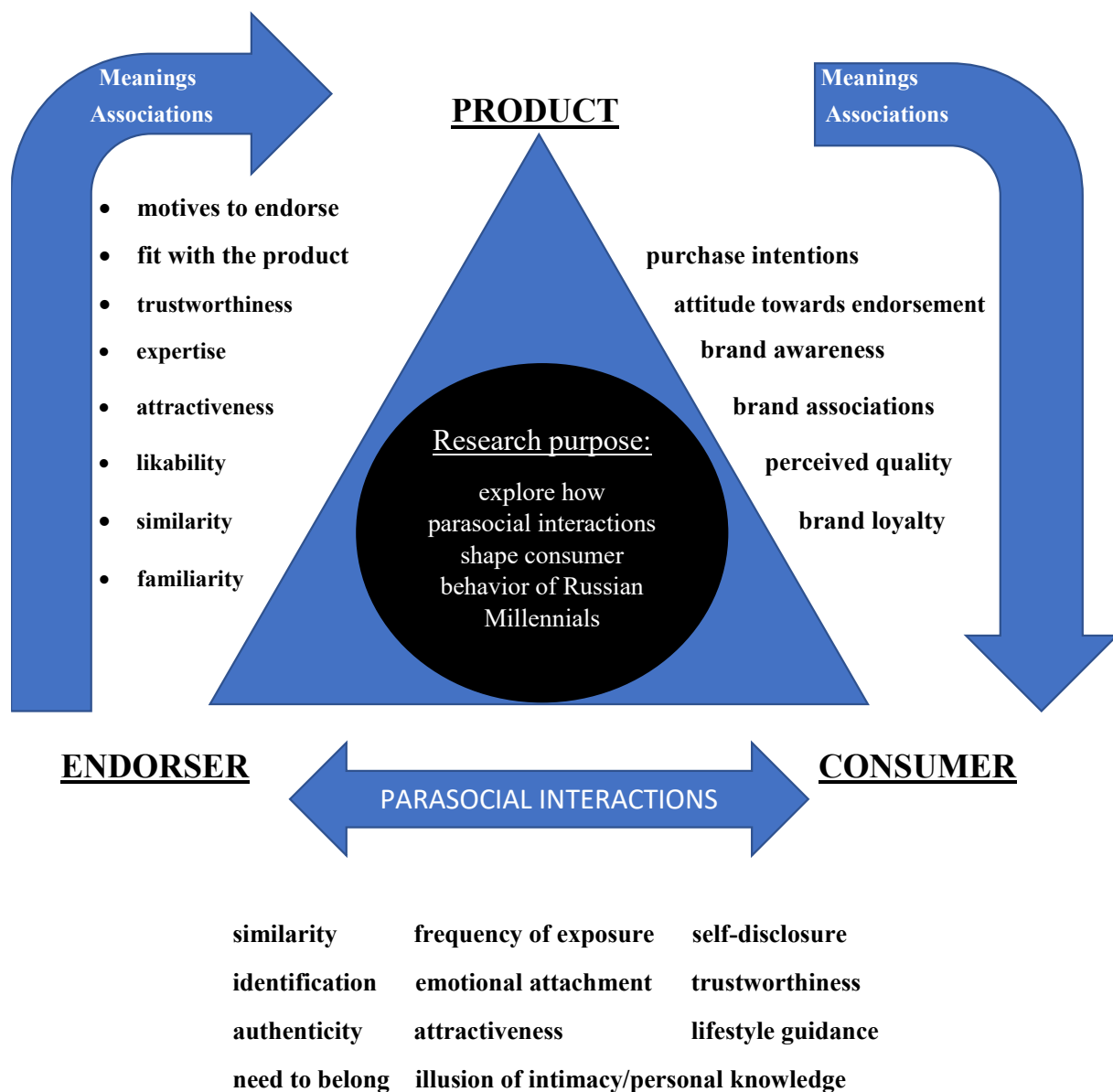need to belong   illusion of intimacy/personal knowledge

Figure 1. Synthesis of theoretical framework (adapted from Berquist *et. al*, 2016; Chung & Cho, 2017; Horton & Wohl, 1956; Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Erdogan, 1999; Kamins 1990; McCracken, 1989; McGuire, 1985; Spry *et. al*, 2011; Till, 1998).

First factor, similarity, was pinpointed by Tian and Hoffner (2010) as increasing the strength of followers' parasocial interactions. Chung and Cho (2017) stated that viewing endorser as authentic and believing that they promote the product not only for their own financial gain, leads to increased level of trust during parasocial interactions with the endorser. Frequency can be described as an aspect measuring how often followers interact with or seek to find more information about a celebrity; Horton and Wohl (1956) proposed that frequency serves as factor strengthening parasocial interactions. Authors argue that amount of time viewers spend observing a celebrity correlates with parasocial interactions' strength. Russell and Stern (2006) stated that strong parasocial emotional attachment causes followers to pay increased attention to media figures. High level of attraction to media persona is another factor predicting stronger parasocial interactions (Turner, 1993). The author states that public figures' high level of attractiveness causes viewers to pay close attention to them.

Horton and Wohl (1956) stated that media personas that address their fans in a personal way, increase the strength of parasocial interactions; such behavior is perceived as emotionally engaging by the fans and influences them to look forward for further communication with these celebrities. Lueck (2015) stated that celebrity's personal social media posts engage the followers through the illusion of intimacy, as the followers are addressed by the celebrity as their own friends; such an approach creates stronger parasocial interactions with the followers. Lueck (2015) stated that celebrities provide lifestyle guidance to their followers; followers are searching for advice how to obtain the desired lifestyle, displayed by the celebrities on their social media. Such information is attentively observed by the followers and this, in turn, increases engagement and strength of parasocial interactions with the media figure. Escalas and Bettman (2017) state that consumers displaying high need to belong are more susceptible to celebrity's parasocial interactions.

3. CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH

3.1. Research philosophy

Social sciences' philosophy is guided by the concepts of ontology and epistemology (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Ontological and epistemological assumptions, in turn, guide methodological choice for the research. Researcher possesses personal beliefs about the reality and these beliefs are affecting conduction of the research. Thus, researcher must recognize his/her personal influence on the research process and see it as a collaborative effort with the research participants (Burr, 2015). The framework for interpretation of the research findings is built from ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions blocks; this framework represents the paradigm, that can be defined as a particular outlook on the world, that determines what is a legitimate way to obtain the knowledge, and what is not (Gummesson, 2005). Paradigm determines what is examined, how this phenomenon is analyzed and how the findings are interpreted (Arndt, 1985). Preunderstanding and paradigm of the researcher underpin the process of every research and serve as a basis for conducting the research (Gummesson, 2005).

There are multiple philosophical paradigms existing, however there are researchers who argue that all qualitative research is interpretive (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Social constructionism paradigm serves as a basis for this thesis; social constructionism views reality as a product of cognitive and social processes (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Social interaction is seen as the source of knowledge by this paradigm, with an emphasis put on the use of language in the society (Burr, 2015). Language is seen as social process that plays a role in maintaining the knowledge in social constructionism paradigm. Social constructionism is a leading paradigm in interpretive research (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

This research is based on ontological assumption that the reality is constructed by the individuals, it is plural and holistic (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). Thus, the reality cannot be objectively analyzed, but only experienced and understood by an individual. Epistemology focuses on defining the nature of knowledge and determining its limits and the sources it can be obtained from (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Thus, epistemological assumption determines researcher's stance about the way the knowledge is obtained. This thesis is based on epistemological assumption that all research is dependent on the context and is subjective. Thus,

36

researcher must understand that research conclusion is, in essence, just one of the possible interpretations acquired through the analysis of the phenomenon. To gain a more profound knowledge of the phenomenon, it is necessary for the researcher to co-produce research findings together with the research participants (Arndt, 1985). Gummesson (2005) suggests that the researcher should utilize reflexivity and common sense in order to interpret the phenomenon. Research findings are dependent on socio-historic context of their construction process, thus, influenced by the researcher, who is also an interpreter of these findings. Knowledge cannot be absolute; however, research findings allow to produce plausible interpretation of the phenomenon under question.

Gummesson (2005) suggests three phases of the research edifice, that will be implemented in this thesis. As the research proceeds, these phases are taking place. First phase is called basement of the research; it is constituted by the researcher's pre-understandings and at this stage, the researcher makes a choice of the topic and problems to examine. The next stage is called the middle floors of research, during this stage data is generated and analyzed. Gummesson (2005) pinpoints that data is generated and not just collected during this stage. Since data of this thesis is related to socially constructed phenomenon, it is implied that the researcher is co-producing the data together with the respondents. Empirical data is interpreted by the researcher and the findings are affected by his/her subjective perception. Further, this data is analyzed with the use of the theoretical framework constructed during the previous stage. In the next stage, penthouse, the researcher provides explanations of the findings and makes conclusions to his/her research. Gummesson (2005) points out that these conclusions might be useful for the other researchers studying this subject, as well as for the practitioners in the industry connected to the research topic.

3.2. Research strategy

3.2.1. Qualitative method

Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) point out that qualitative methods include context surrounding the phenomenon into account, thus, it is possible to examine the phenomenon holistically. Quantitative methods are used to find relationships between variables while qualitative methods are used to reach an understanding of the complex phenomenon (Gummesson, 2005). While quantitative research examines the phenomenon by testing

hypothesis and collecting the numerical data, qualitative research is aimed at reaching an understanding based on the interpreting and analyzing of the meanings surrounding this phenomenon (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how parasocial interactions shape consumer behavior of Russian Millennials. Quantitative method was not chosen for this study, as there was no need to measure the phenomenon in this research. Instead, context and verbal descriptions surrounding the celebrity endorsement and parasocial interactions phenomenon were examined. Qualitative method was chosen for this thesis to facilitate the research purpose. It is important to point out that most of the recent research conducted with parasocial interactions utilized the quantitative method and coding (Chung & Cho, 2017; Escalas & Bettman, 2017; Lueck, 2015). Previous research gives examples that quantitative approach is applicable and successful in analyzing parasocial interactions phenomenon. In this thesis, it was decided not to use quantitative approach, as it can be beneficial to implement qualitative approach and examine the phenomenon and its surrounding context holistically. Use of semi-structured interviews could give more freedom to participant, allowing them to share insightful personal comments and experiences (Thompson, 1997). Additionally, as consumers attach certain meanings to celebrities, analyzing these meanings by the use of the qualitative approach seems to be an appropriate choice (McCracken, 1989).

The method serves as the basis of conducting the research and analyzing the empirical data, thus, it is closely linked with the data generation, theoretical framework and research questions (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Gummesson (2005) points out that interpretation, analysis and data collection are simultaneous in qualitative research. Theoretical framework of this thesis was constructed simultaneously with the conduction of the interviews and generation of the empirical data. Gummesson (2005) points out that non-linear process of generating research knowledge is referred to as hermeneutic spiral. Hermeneutic approach is applied in the interpretation process, when the researcher moves between already obtained knowledge and the new knowledge, from pre-understanding to enhanced understanding of the phenomenon. Gummesson (2005) argues that by using hermeneutic spiral, theory is not only generated, but constantly put to the test, thus is validated, improving research's overall quality.

Two principal approaches exist in the research: deductive and inductive (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Deductive research is based on utilizing theories to explain specific phenomenon, while inductive research focuses on constructing generalizations based on individually observed phenomenon. On the other hand, abduction can be defined as a combination of deduction and induction methods. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) point out

that deduction and induction are implemented at different stages of the research, in a way moving back-and-forth between the two methods. This way, abduction allows to move from theoretical framework to obtaining research data, and based on this data, to create further adjustments to the theoretical framework. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) point out that abduction can be understood as collecting participants' descriptive answers, at the same time applying concepts and categories surrounding the phenomenon and combining both actions to reach a deeper understanding of this phenomenon.

3.2.2. Semi-structured interviews

During a one-on-one interview with the participant, he/she is sharing own personal experiences and interpretations (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Interviews can be semi-structured, thus, they focus on following the course of participants' personal stories. The use of interviews is common for the business research and serves as a primary source of data (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Semi-structured interviews do not follow pre-determined list of questions, instead, the interview is focused on participants' personal experiences and stories, as well as the meanings that they communicate about these experiences (Thompson, 1997). As the main goal of utilizing interviews is to analyze the meanings that participants attach to certain events or objects, interviews are commonly used by the interpretive research. Semi-structured interviews are intended so that respondents are not strictly controlled and able to suggest other possible viewpoints that were not even considered by the researcher (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). This way, interviews are focusing on reaching a deeper understanding of the complex phenomena. Semi-structured interviews are based on the combination of flexibility and structure. The purpose of this thesis is to explore how parasocial interactions shape consumer behavior of Russian Millennials. Semi-structured interviews were chosen to look deeper into participants' personal experiences and explanations surrounding how celebrities they follow might impact their consumer behavior.

Even though the list of questions was created for this research, it was only used for the purpose to provide the basis for the possible conversations. This way, preliminary interview questions were not asked in a predetermined order; additional questions were asked when relevant story or remark was made by a participant. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) point out that informal tone is used in interviews, allowing for casual conversation between the respondent and the interviewer, however, this allows for collecting of the comprehensive data.

Additionally, respondents were encouraged to answer questions by using their own linguistic expressions. For this reason, it was important that all the interviews are conducted in Russian. It is noted that flexibility is important in the interview process, as the researcher might not be able to predict what questions can lead to revealing insightful information about the phenomenon. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) point out that difficulty in data analyzation process lies in finding similar patterns in participants' answers due to the vast differences in their content.

Malhotra and Birks (2007) point out four aspects of one-on-one interviews. First of all, this type of interviews allows to explore everyday events: participants possess practical understanding of these events and share this knowledge in the interview. Secondly, one-on-one interviews allow to investigate the contextual background as well, making it possible to reach more profound understanding of the phenomenon. Interviews provide multi-faceted perspective on the phenomenon, that, in turn, leads to realization that there is a multitude of ways to interpret this phenomenon (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Lastly, interviews require reflection from the interviewer: as the interviewer possesses pre-understanding of the phenomenon in question, it affects interpretation of the collected during the interviews data, making it biased. It is necessary for the interviewer to pay attention to the way he/she creates interpretations during the data analyzation process (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Mutual trust needs to be established between the interviewer and the respondent in order to reach an atmosphere, in which respondent feels comfortable to share personal stories and experiences. Thus, interpersonal interactions are the focus of interviewing technique, as these interactions allow to explore participants' private experiences (Malhotra & Birks, 2007).

3.3. Data generation

Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) point out that participants' suitability and accessibility are two main factors that are necessary to consider in qualitative research's participants selection process. In this research, overall twelve participants from researcher's personal network in Russia were selected for the interviews. As mentioned earlier, Millennials are avid users of the social media and celebrity endorsement is a tool that marketers find effective for reaching this audience (McCormick, 2016). All participants were female Russian Millennials aged 25-28, living in various locations, with different levels of education and working in various occupations.

Before the conduction of interviews, all potential participants were contacted by the researcher and asked whether they have ever bought a product endorsed on social media by the celebrities that they follow. If they responded with a positive answer, these people were asked to participate in the research. All interviews were conducted in Russia, either in person in one of the Rybinsk restaurants or via Skype, if participants were living in Moscow, Saint Petersburg or Yaroslavl. All the interview participants' information and interview durations can be found in Table 1. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed, with relevant information translated into English and used in the findings section of this thesis. Three interviews were conducted in February and the other nine interviews were conducted in March.

Preliminary list with fifteen interview questions was created for starting the conversation and making participants more comfortable in the beginning of the interview. Some interviewees wanted to be more clearly guided by the interviewer, thus, the list of questions was used to give more structure to the interview, if requested. List of the preliminary interview questions can be found in the appendices section of this thesis. The reason for choosing semi-structured interviews as the method for this research is to obtain a deeper understanding of the process of how social media celebrity endorsements shape consumer behaviors, thus, to analyze the phenomenon holistically. Semi-structured interviews allow to gain an insight into how consumers perceive marketing attempts and what attempts are perceived as persuasive. As Millennial population is large and considered to be one of the most highly-spending segments (Forbes, 2017), it is important for the marketers to investigate consumer behaviors of these individuals.

As argued by Malhotra and Birks (2007), it is necessary to establish a level of mutual trust in order to create comfortable atmosphere for the interview participants to share their stories. Participants from researcher's personal network were interviewed in this research due to established level of trust between researcher and participants, allowing to obtain very personal interview responses, that potentially can be insightful for understanding parasocial interactions' influence on consumer. Parasocial interactions established between followers and celebrities can be viewed as a personal matter that participants might not be willing to discuss. This can be compared to asking questions about established relationship between two people. It was decided to select participants that the interviewer already knew. It was estimated that participants would be more willing to share such personal details, since the level of trust between them and the interviewer is already established. The majority of the interview participants are interviewer's friends from Russian high school, with whom contact was maintained after the graduation. If interview participants were recruited from outside researcher's personal network, these participants might have been more reluctant to discuss

41

their parasocial interactions and how they shaped their consumer behavior. Additionally, as Millennials are known to be a generation receptive to celebrity endorsement (McCormick, 2016) and researcher had a personal access to Russian Millennial participants, it has been decided to utilize an available opportunity and recruit participants from personal network.

Additionally, it was necessary to select participants that are avid users of the social media, who pay attention to celebrities and other public figures by following them on social media. Since followers engage with these personalities on social media, it can be assumed that parasocial interactions indeed took place. The researcher contacted potential participants by messaging them on social media and asked if they follow public figures. Most of the participants contacted confirmed that they are subscribed to several public figures. The second important factor in pre-selecting the participants was to establish that they had an experience of purchasing a product endorsed by celebrity on social media. Without this pre-selection, it would not be possible to examine the link between parasocial interaction and consumer behavior of the followers, thus, it would not be possible to accomplish the research purpose. In case the individual confirmed following public figures on social media, however, did not possess experience of buying the endorsed product, they were excluded from participating in the interview. It was decided to conduct as many interviews as possible, as multiple interviews would allow to collect vast amount of data and showcase similarities in the patterns of consumer behaviors. Overall, it was possible to conduct twelve interviews with the participants.

Russian participants were chosen, first of all, because it was possible for the interviewer to pre-select them to fit the criteria for the interview process. It was beneficial to choose interviewees consisting of people from the same cultural background, as individuals with the same cultural background exhibit similarities in building of their identities (Mehta & Belk, 1990). Additionally, selecting Russians would be beneficial for the research, as the interviewer is also Russian; the language barrier and cultural misunderstandings would also be eliminated, improving the quality of the research by preventing misunderstanding of the data. Overall, as the number of the interviews is essentially limited, it would be more beneficial to select respondents with the same cultural background, age and gender. Additionally, interviewing only Russians would offer a more cohesive example of self-concept and showcase how it is influenced by parasocial interactions.

It was necessary to conduct a pilot interview to test what difficulties might occur during the interview process and see if any cohesive findings could be obtained. Pilot interview was conducted with a participant from Moscow. The interview was recorded, then transcribed and translated into English, with a careful effort made to keep the meaning as close to the

original as possible. As the respondent requested an additional guidance from the interviewer, all the questions from the list were utilized during an interview, however, their order was changed to fit the natural flow of the conversation. After conduction of the pilot interview, list of the questions was not edited, and all the following interviews were conducted in the same manner. The range of the interview duration is between 32 to 58 minutes, depending on the natural flow of the conversation and willingness of respondents to spend their time on the interview process. Before the end of the interview, all the participants were asked if they have something they would like to add. In most cases, the participants added concluding remarks that were insightful and helped to analyze the phenomenon. Most of the participants offered their own opinion on how celebrities are utilizing parasocial interactions in the process of endorsement. Interestingly, the participants showed similar outlooks on the mechanism of parasocial influence, that will be further discussed in the findings section.

Participant	Occupation	Age	Location	Interview duration
Alexandra	IT specialist	26	Moscow	43 min
Alisa	Sommelier	28	St. Petersburgh	36 min
Alla	Finance assistant	26	St. Petersburgh	46 min
Vera	Economist	25	Rybinsk	54 min
Valeriya	Gym front desk	26	Moscow	49 min
Diana	Web designer	25	St. Petersburgh	34 min
Darya	Lawyer assistant	25	Moscow	42 min
Elena	Pharmacist	26	Moscow	58 min
Kristina	Art manager	26	Rybinsk	50 min
Marina	Dentist	25	Rybinsk	49 min
Natalia	Economist	26	Yaroslavl	38 min
Olesya	Office assistant	25	Moscow	32 min

Table 3: Interview participants' pseudonyms and information.

The pilot interviewee was additionally asked if she could evaluate clearness of the questions and the overall interview experience, in order to improve the process for next participants. The participant responded that the way the interview was conducted, and its content, is adequate. It was important to not restrict the interviewees with pre-set questions, as well as point out that there are no wrong or right answers in the interview process. It was communicated to interviewees that they can answer the questions in any way they prefer, or not answer these questions at all, if they feel uncomfortable to do so. Since the first interviewee

requested list of interview questions for her convenience, it was decided to send this list to all the participants as well.

Originally eight people were confirmed to participate in the interview, however, some of the potential participants, who did not previously respond, responded later and were included in the interview process. Additionally, some participants that were originally unsure if they are interested in participating, confirmed their participation later. Thus, the final number of participants amounted to twelve people. After the interview data was collected from these twelve participants, it was evaluated to be enough to conclude the study based on the similar patterns identified in the participants' answers. As the amount of data was determined to be sufficient, it was decided not to search for more participants outside the researchers' personal network. On several occasions, the interviewees said that they do not know how to answer the question or felt like they might have misunderstood it and, as a consequence of this, might be answering incorrectly. In response to such situations, the interviewer rephrased the question. Additionally, if the respondent was confused about what exactly she is asked during the interview, the interviewer answered the question herself and offered an example of a personal story. It helped respondents to understand the question better, so that they could answer this question themselves.

3.4. Data analysis

This thesis' research purpose and main theoretical choices can be seen in Figure 1 at the end of the second chapter. The research purpose is represented in a circle inside the triangular figure, that combines endorser, product, consumer and all aspects that define their connections. Altogether, this triangular figure is based on its inner circle, holding this thesis' research purpose. Semi-structured interviews are aimed to address this research purpose by providing the data that showcases themes of parasocial interactions' influence on consumer behavior.

As stated by Gummesson (2005), it is common for the qualitative research to have simultaneous data generation, data analyzation and data interpretation stages. This is relevant to this thesis, and some notes taken during the interviews showcase that certain interpretations and observations were already made during the data generation process. Gummesson (2005) points out that data should be recorded in a way that allows for convenient use and analysis of this data. This way, it was necessary to arrange collection of data in a way that is organized and

easily accessible. Gummesson (2005) states that theoretical framework could be used to organize the respondents answers and guide researcher's focus, so that attention is paid to the relevant data and phenomenon's aspects relevant to the research. Data analysis process started from transcribing all the interviews and highlighting participants' answers that seemed relevant to the research question. Additionally, any answers containing relevant to the research context observations, were highlighted as well.

It was necessary to transcribe the interviews on the same day they were collected, in order to ensure that all the information is recorded correctly, and the original meanings expressed by participants are captured. Next to such observations, note was made in bold font, pointing out the main idea and keyword associated with it. Separate Microsoft Word file was created, and the highlighted text was copied into the master file, organized according to the emerged themes. This file served as the basis for the fourth chapter of this thesis. Researchers state that systematic way of recording and analyzing of data is necessary for creating reliable results of the research (Malhotra & Birks, 2007).

The findings section started with organized by the theme quotes, highlighting similar patterns detected in participants' answers. These patterns were linked to the observations mentioned in the theoretical framework. Thus, theoretical references were synthesized with the findings and conclusions were made. All transcripts were re-read multiple times, in different order, for the purpose that no insightful information was omitted. Re-reading information in reverse order gave a new perspective on the data, since all the previously created mental links were deconstructed, allowing to make fresh observations. After multiple re-reads of the collected transcripts, and realization that no more similar patterns can be detected, seven topics were included in the final list of findings.

Gummesson (2005) states that data should be collected until no new findings can be detected. This point of data collection process, when no new data is expected to be collected and findings start to seem repetitive, is called the data saturation. Certain participants' answers were used more than the other participants', because they were more revealing and allowed a deeper insight into the phenomenon. However, quotes from all the interview participants were included in this thesis. Overall, seven patterns were created to showcase the main findings detected in the collected data. Gummesson (2005) defines research credibility as an ability of the researcher to combine generated data and insights, so that it is possible to see a clear link between them and the proposed interpretations of the findings.
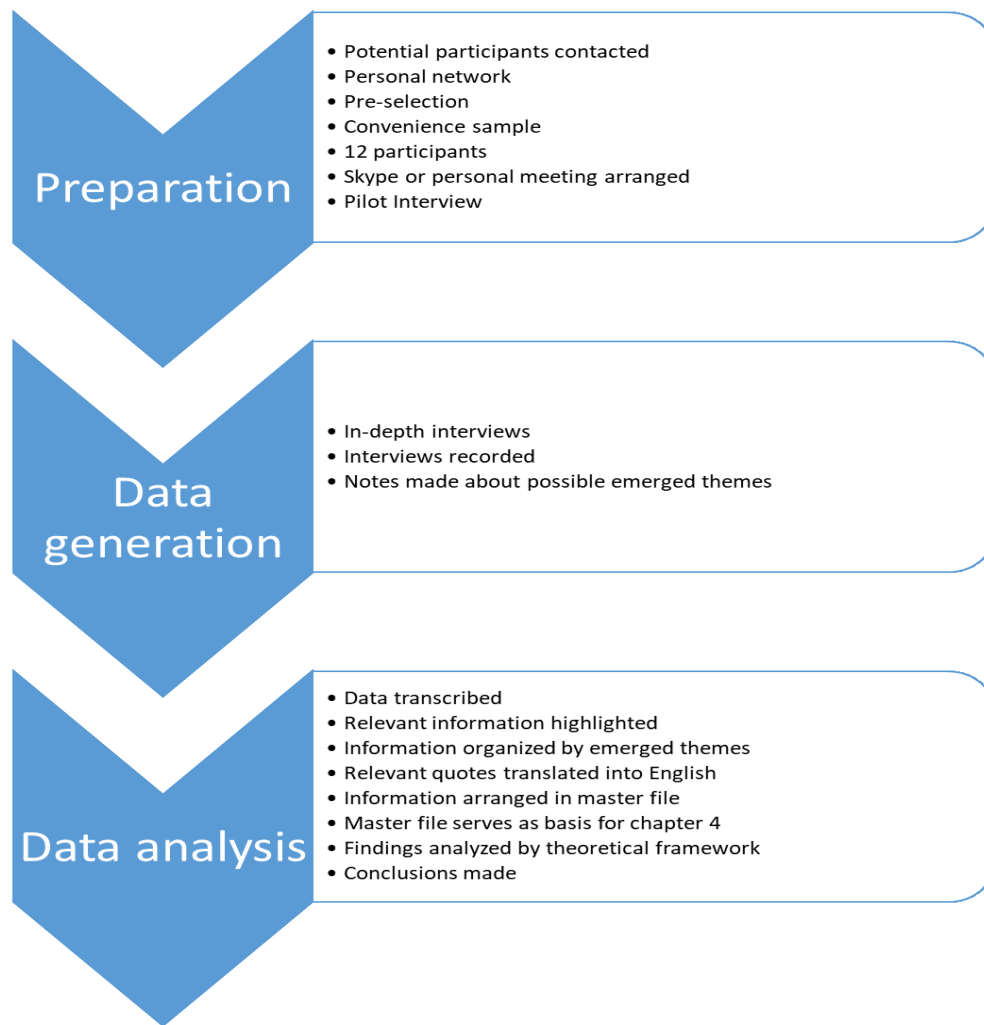
Preparation
- Potential participants contacted
- Personal network
- Pre-selection
- Convenience sample
- 12 participants
- Skype or personal meeting arranged
- Pilot Interview

Data generation
- In-depth interviews
- Interviews recorded
- Notes made about possible emerged themes

Data analysis
- Data transcribed
- Relevant information highlighted
- Information organized by emerged themes
- Relevant quotes translated into English
- Information arranged in master file
- Master file serves as basis for chapter 4
- Findings analyzed by theoretical framework
- Conclusions made

Figure 2. Data generation and data analysis process.

In summary, this research was focused on exploring the complex phenomenon and qualitative method is often used for such intent. One of the method's limitation is that small number of the interviewees make the research findings not generalizable to the entire Millennial population. As the thesis is implementing a qualitative approach, the results' interpretation is affected by the subjectivity of the researcher. Collected empirical data will be analyzed and interpreted using the constructed theoretical framework in the next section. This research implements social constructionism paradigm, chosen as a helpful way to better understand socially constructed phenomena. The interviews were conducted in person or via Skype in Russian, as it is the native language of interviewees and the interviewer, in order to avoid possible misunderstandings. In the next section of this thesis, findings are presented, and the used quotes are translated word-by-word into English, keeping in mind Russian cultural constructs. Ethical standards of the University of Tampere were observed in this research. All

respondents were asked for the permission to release their interview answers in this thesis. Some of the participants expressed a wish to remain anonymous regarding certain answers. It was decided to assign generic female Russian pseudonyms to all the participants to ensure their anonymity.

4. RUSSIAN MILLENNIALS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENT

4.1. Following celebrities and influencers on social media

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how parasocial interactions shape consumer behavior of Russian Millennials. In order to address this purpose, twelve respondents were selected to participate in semi-structured interviews. In this chapter, research observations collected during conduction of these interviews will be presented in detail. These observations will be analyzed based on the theoretical framework introduced in the previous chapter. It will be further revealed in theoretical framework's reevaluation section that most of the observations were in line with the theoretical framework, while only few elements of the framework were not supported with the participants' responses.

Overall, the findings showcased that parasocial interactions are increasing followers' trust towards the endorser, making it more likely for them to be susceptible to the celebrity endorsement. Research findings were added to the theoretical framework in order to advance the understanding of parasocial interactions' influence on consumer behavior. Seven themes surrounding parasocial interactions' influence on consumer behavior were discovered. However, more questions arose from the conduction of this research; these questions will be discussed in the next chapter, together with the recommendation for further research. These recommendations will be focused on how parasocial interactions can be better utilized to enhance the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement on social media. The list of interview questions used in this study can be found in the appendices section.

4.1.1. Popular social media platforms

During the interview, all participants were asked what social media platforms they use. Collecting this data allows to learn more about the context in which this thesis' phenomenon takes place—on the social media. Most of the participants answered that they use Instagram and Vkontakte, with some participants mentioned YouTube as well, while Facebook was used only by few participants. These responses are in line with Practical Ecommerce's 2017 statistics about social media use in Russia. Additionally, participants revealed that they use different

social media platforms for different reasons. Most of the participants answered that they use Vkontakte to communicate with their closest friends and family members, as well as to look at the photos that their friends and family post on a daily basis. Instagram was perceived as the main platform for following people that participants are not personally acquainted with and see what is currently trending, especially in terms of fashion, beauty and lifestyle. Additionally, respondents reported that Instagram was the platform they associate the most with their purchase decisions of endorsed products.

I use Vkontakte and Instagram very often. Vkontakte mostly to talk to my friends and Instagram to keep updated about what is happening in the world. I rarely use Facebook, but I have account on it. Also, I watch YouTube when I need to see a how-to-do video or a new music video.

--Diana

I use Instagram a lot through the day, I receive notifications on my phone. I'm on Vkontakte as well, I check my messages regularly. I don't have my own YouTube account, but I use it to watch some popular channels.

--Natalia

YouTube was mostly used to watch videos that are currently trending, especially vlogs and music videos. YouTube was reportedly used mainly for entertainment purposes, however several participants mentioned that they use it to learn new skills from watching how-to-do videos as well. However, several participants reported that, even though they used YouTube on multiple occasions, they did not register a personal account on that platform. Facebook was used only by several respondents, it was reportedly used mainly for receiving informational updates from various public pages. These findings are in line with Moore's (2012) statement that Millennials utilize interactive media for information seeking as well as entertainment purposes.

4.1.2 Time spent on social media

As frequency of exposure serves as a factor determining strength of parasocial interactions (Kassing & Sanderson, 2009), it was necessary to collect data regarding the amount

of time followers spend on the social media daily. Addressing the question of time spent on social media facilitates the research purpose, as information about Russian Millennials' social media use is collected; it becomes possible to gain a perspective on how deeply engaged participants are with the celebrities that they follow. It is notable that the majority of respondents admitted that they use social media more often than they would like to. Several respondents spoke about their social media use with an exhausted tone, as if they were complaining or confessing something that they are not proud of. However, all the respondents admitted that they are strongly dependent on social media and it plays a role in their everyday life. It is noteworthy that several participants admitted that they use social media not only during their leisure time, but also during their work hours.

One participant admitted that she allows herself to use social media for a long time only while she is at work. When she leaves the office or during the weekend, she tries to minimize the time spent on social media. Participant explained that she does not want to overwhelm her life with excessive social media use and strives to spend her time on real-life "offline" activities. Other participants spoke about their social media use at work in a humorous tone, however, they admitted that using social media at work is a real problem that is hard for them to cope with. One of the participants revealed that she lost a job due to the inability to stop using social media at work:

I was caught using Vkontakte at work. However, I did not agree with the management. I was talking to customers on the phone and during the calls, I had to do a lot of waiting, while customers took their time to respond. So, I would just be on Vkontakte while I am waiting. My manager saw me doing this and told me to come to the office, I was in a lot of trouble. But I continued doing this because it made no sense to me— why I cannot use social media, if this does not affect my performance? I was caught doing this again and it resulted in me being fired. I was really upset about this situation because overly strict rules were not making sense to me. It did not matter because I found a new job pretty fast. And, to be honest, the whole office of coworkers agreed with me and told me that I was right, and the managers were wrong.

--Alexandra

This story showcases how prominent and influential social media can be in everyday lives of Russian Millennials. It is possible to conclude that participants are engaged in strong parasocial interactions, as they spend several hours on social media daily. Further in this section, participants will acknowledge that they are subscribed to various social media celebrities. It is logical to conclude that participants receive daily updates from these celebrities, allowing for stronger parasocial interactions to be established. Additionally, it is important to point out that the participant, as well as her coworkers, expected the management to be understanding towards their social media needs at work. On this personal story example, as well as other participants' responses, it is possible to conclude that use of social media is viewed as a basic need by Russian Millennials.

4.1.3. Social media subscriptions

It was necessary to explore what leads participants to subscribe to social media celebrities, as that would allow to analyze how parasocial interactions emerge on the social media. On a question about how they decide what celebrities to subscribe to, the majority of participants answered that they were suggested to subscribe to celebrities by their social media platforms' notifications. These notifications are typically based on the platforms' mechanism of suggestion of similar celebrities that the follower might also like, based on her current subscriptions. Some of the common celebrities that respondents subscribed to were Kseniya Sobchak (Moscow socialite), Sergey Shnurov (musician), Olga Buzova (reality TV star), Timati (rapper), as well as international celebrities such as Hadid sisters (models), Kardashian/Jenner sisters (reality TV stars), and other famous musicians and Hollywood actors.

To explain why participants are interested in celebrity's videos and photos, most common answers were that they would like to follow celebrity's personal life and stay well-informed about them. This response is in line with illusion of intimacy/personal knowledge factor in parasocial interactions (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). Additionally, respondents stated that by following celebrities and influencers, they are learning about the trends, especially fashion and beauty. Among other reasons for following, respondents stated that they are interested in learning about hair care and hair styles, eyebrows and manicure. Respondents wanted to know about currently fashionable handbags and shoes as well as newest beauty solutions. Additionally, respondents showcased interest in following experts in certain skills or knowledge, it was among the most popular reasons for following.

I want to keep up with the mainstream ideas, pay attention to what is happening, how celebrities react to it, find out new information. To follow in their stream of life.

--Marina

Because they are the leaders of public opinion, I can look up to them, they reflect on agendas of the day. Often I find out from their posts about what is fashionable, what modern life has to offer. And I am interested in their outlook on life.

--Alla

I like it when celebrities are talking about their travels, the books they publish and read and what they wear.

--Dariya

I feel like in 2019 you post something, and it becomes public domain. I think, famous people definitely know that too. If they make a mistake, everyone will notice it. However, I appreciate it that I can see all this information for myself, good or bad, on my screen. It makes me feel connected to the outside world and everything that happens in it.

--Kristina

Celebrity's personal life updates were named to be the most interesting content to see on social media, especially scandalous information that participants claimed to be attention-grabbing and stimulating. Additionally, participants stated that they pay closer attention, if the video has suggestive thumbnail and provocative title. However, the majority of participants believed that there is a lot of fake information on social media and public figures are trying to create controversy to draw attention and improve their popularity ratings. Respondents were not proud to follow such information but viewed it as necessary evil of being a social media user—they simply cannot help it but pay attention to controversies.

Kseniya Sobchak has bought a lot of publicity from the media outlets to create a rumor that she is divorcing her husband because she has a new boyfriend. They say her husband beat him up. But in reality, all three of them are real-life friends and are trying to attract public attention before the premier of Sobchak's new theater play.

--Diana

4.1.4. Negative attitude towards advertisement

Similar to the need to explore reasons to engage in parasocial interactions, it was necessary to see what factors lead to followers' decision to disengage from parasocial interactions. Respondents shared some of the reasons why they would unsubscribe from the public figure. Some common reasons included excessive advertising. Common pattern in participants' answers can be identified in that advertising was found to be extremely irritating. Several respondents said that they dislike seeing advertising videos or seeing irrelevant advertising on Instagram. Most of participants stated that they would like to avoid advertising on their social media as much as possible.

Respondents said that they are frustrated by official companies' useless posts advertising products that they do not need. Notably, majority of respondents referred to advertising with the same adjective "irritating". This finding is in line with Henrie and Taylor's (2009) argument that Millennial consumers show negative attitude to the tedious persuasion attempts and to the source of this persuasion, if they recognize that such an attempt occurred. Additionally, respondents stated that they do not like it when celebrities post selfies focusing on just endorsing products and with no substance, since, in their opinion, it has no content value. The following statements about advertising on social media were made by participants:

> *Advertising is irritating because it interferes with the main content I am actually interested in. But I understand that this is financial help for social media figures, so it is necessary. I am ok with certain amount of commercial posts on the channel, but too much is too much.*
>
> *--Vera*

> *I am annoyed at advertising on YouTube channels' videos, it steals my time and I really do not understand why this advertising always shows something I am just not interested in.*
>
> *--Alla*

> *I really hate it when Sobchak is advertising her next sponsored underwear or another lipstick. Like, she says, I am using this and this, I bought these pants where and where, this is irritating to me.*
>
> *--Alexandra*

I would like to use my own account on YouTube, however, I never log into it. If I do, I will see advertising before every video I am clicking on. If I do not log into account, I do not see any advertising and I love it. I mean, it is really annoying that I cannot maintain my own account on YouTube. I cannot have subscriptions and keep updated with all the YouTubers' channels that I would like to get notifications from. But it is really worth it. I am accessing YouTube anonymously, I really cannot stand it to see all the advertising on YouTube.

--Natalia

4.1.5. Hidden advertisement

In comparison to obvious advertising strategies, social media personalities can utilize other strategies, that are less noticeable form of advertising. Several respondents acknowledged that they know that hidden advertising exists on social media and they think that it is more effective. For example, some participants pointed out that they might not always notice marketing efforts and are not sure if advertising even took place:

When Instagram models wear some brand clothes, you can see what brand that is. However, they do not tag the endorsement on the post. But I think, just to see someone wearing something you like is enough. Plus, you can see the brand logo on it—and you can assume that you go on that brand's website, you can buy it, since influencers usually aware of all the trends and like to wear new clothes. I bought Vans shoes like this one time.

--Alla

I am subscribed to probably all the main YouTube beauty gurus and in their videos, they are doing their make-up using products by different brands. I cannot tell if they are sponsored or not. Sometimes they say if they are promoting something. But sometimes they do not say anything. There are many videos exposing YouTubers, a lot of them show that YouTubers promoted some products without acknowledging it. I simply do not know if they advertised or shared their honest thoughts on the product they genuinely liked.

--Olesya

54

4.1.6. Traits of attractive social media personas

Further, the interviewees elaborated on characteristics of social media personas that they find to be attractive in order to subscribe to them. It was important to ask this question in order to identify whether the responses corresponded with factors of theoretical framework. Most popular quality mentioned by participants was achievement of something outstanding on celebrity's part. This is in line with celebrity endorsement theory's notion that celebrities are seen as successful people and followers are seeking celebrity's guidance to obtain their own success (McCracken, 1989). Interestingly, several respondents pointed out that they are looking for strong moral values in the people that they follow. Additionally, they pointed out that they tend to follow people based on their personalities, however, different respondents claimed different preferences in terms of the character.

I see celebrities as older peers. Like people I orient myself on.

--Alisa

They are educated, intelligent, behave in appropriate way, have high standard of manners. They look and dress well, they are successful. They always developing themselves, aim to reach new horizons. They are not stuck in one place in life.

--Dariya

I watched Navalnii's famous YouTube video and now I follow his posts. He is genuine and tells things how they really are in Russian politics. I am also outspoken person and I appreciate that he does not filter what he says. I would like to know the truth.

--Natalia

4.1.7. Similarity

Several factors of theoretical framework were identified in participants' responses. One of the observations is that followers tend to subscribe to social media personalities that they can relate to. It can be concluded that similarity with public figure on social media and identification with them, plays a big role in parasocial interactions. This is in line with theoretical framework's notion that parasocial interactions are likely to occur between fans and

celebrity that they find themselves to be similar with (Horton & Wohl, 1956). In their answers, respondents pinpointed that they like to follow celebrities that they have similarities with, be it in terms of character, outlook on life or appearance:

I follow Mila Kunis on Instagram. A lot of things she says I agree with. She is originally Ukrainian. We share the look, I am brunette with long hair. I copied her make-up look for the New Years.

--Olesya

I follow public figures for intellectual reasons. I like to analyze how they perceive reality, what is their personality, what drives them. It is like people watching, but on social media. It is interesting to follow celebrities that have same style as you do, or post about hobbies you also have.

--Vera

4.1.8. Attractiveness

One of the aspects that was claimed to increase the strength of parasocial interactions in the theoretical framework, was attraction to the public figure (Turner, 1993). As discussed in the theoretical framework, attractiveness can be understood both as psychological (as discussed on the previous page) or in terms of physical beauty. During the interviews, several respondents said that they follow actors and singers they feel attracted to, based on their looks:

I am subscribed to American actors I like. Zac Efron is really good-looking guy.

--Alexandra

Ever since I saw "Titanic" when I was child, I had a crush on Leonardo DiCaprio. I think that everyone I knew did, he was very popular. I still follow him on Instagram, he does not look old.

--Vera

I follow Timati (Russian rapper) because he always looks good, he has nice style of clothes and tattoos.

--Elena

56

4.1.9. Unattractive characteristics of social media personas

Identifying factors that can lead to the end of parasocial interactions allows for insightful findings regarding factors determining strength of parasocial interactions to be revealed. Respondents shared some of the traits that they find to be unattractive and that lead them to unsubscribe from the celebrity. The majority of respondents emphasized the importance of behaving according to society's standards, sharing posts that highlight positive and sophisticated personal characteristics. The following statements were made by the participants, suggesting that Russian Millennials value appropriate social media behavior and avoid behaviors considered provocative:

> *Now singer Sergey Shnurov, "Shnur", is very popular, he gives many concerts around Russia and he is on various TV shows. But he curses, smokes and drinks a lot. His music is good, but I dislike him now. He used to behave better, I no longer pay attention to him.*

> *--Marina*

> *Social media recommended me to subscribe to Volochkova (Anastasiya Volochkova, Russian ex prima ballerina, now scandalous Moscow socialite). I do not know why I subscribed to her. Apparently, I was impressed by her talent (jokingly). But I unsubscribed from her very fast because it was just too much for me. To follow her posts without pain, it is impossible.*

> *--Dariya*

Such factor as adhering to society's standards was not identified in the parasocial interactions theory. The other reasons for unsubscribing included situations when respondents felt that there was too much unrelated information, the information provided to them was no longer relevant (due to respondents' changed interest), or social media persona stopped providing information interesting to the subscriber. Decision to unsubscribe in such cases can be explained by loss of the lifestyle guidance, that was one of the factors influencing parasocial interactions (Lueck, 2015). Followers viewed such behavior as inconsistent:

> *I subscribed to a sport person, but they no longer post about sports and post about other topics I am not interested in, so I unsubscribed.*

> *--Valeriya*

If the main reason of the account is forgotten, it becomes uninteresting and I am not staying just for the personal stories of the account holder.

--Alla

When posts go style advice, style advice, style advice, promotion, style advice—this is OK, but if style advice disappears, I unsubscribe.

--Kristina

I do not like when she is posting about attributes of her star life, for example, film festivals she goes to, as I cannot use this information in any way in my real life. So, when she is posting about regular life and doing things we all do, I like that. But when she is talking about red carpet events, I am not interested. She advertises her Valentino dresses and I will never be able to afford one, so what is the reason for me to see this?

--Natalia

The majority of respondents stated that they strongly dislike it when they feel that social media personality is being inauthentic, in terms of their behavior on social media or promotion of something that they do not use. Decision to unsubscribe in such case can be attributed to the loss of authenticity, which is an important factor in parasocial interactions (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

It is irritating to see that they (reality show "Dom 2" stars) promote the same products. I just think they all received a deal from the same company, who are they trying to convince? I do not believe that this shampoo can be that good. And it is sold only in pharmacies and cost over 500 Rubles. I think it is so obvious that these celebrities found a way to make easy money.

--Elena

I do not understand why Kardashians are so popular. They are just everywhere. I never saw the show myself, I do not think it was aired on Russian TV. But I see them everywhere on social media and in the published magazines. I think they are so pretentious and try to look better than they really are. I also think that scandal sells, and this is what they focus on. I watched a video on YouTube and it showcased several things they did to become popular. It is annoying to see them in some serious events, like Grammys or social fundraisers. I do not follow them, they are fake.

--Alisa

When I was younger, I used to like Kseniya Sobchak and I collected magazine articles about her. But now she is not acting like herself, she is not the same person she once was. I think she is trying too hard to stay relevant since she is older now.

<div align="right">

--Alexandra

</div>

4.1.10. Personal life of social media personas

It is possible to confirm the existence of illusion of intimacy/personal knowledge as a factor influencing strength of parasocial interactions based on participants' responses (Lueck, 2015). During the interviews, several respondents mentioned that they were interested in personal life of public figures, as well as keeping up with their daily agenda.

I follow Hadid sisters. It is interesting for me to see details of their daily lives. I think they are very different from one another, and what they post highlights differences in their personalities. I also always pay attention to Bella's posts with her boyfriend (singer The Weekend). I think they are sweet couple, I am happy for them.

<div align="right">

--Kristina

</div>

For certain time, she (Shailene Woodley, American actress) disappeared. She used to often act in the movies I liked, I liked the heroines she portrayed. I liked her too. And then she suddenly disappeared, so I became interested in what exactly was happening in her life so that she does not act in the movies anymore.

<div align="right">

--Diana

</div>

It is possible to conclude that respondents felt like they actually knew these celebrities and perceived what they posted as a real-life information. Participants followed and talked about these celebrities in the same manner that they follow their friends' lives on social media.

4.2. Common themes in parasocial interactions' influence on consumer behavior

During the course of the interviews, it was revealed how parasocial interactions with social media personalities shaped followers' consumer behavior. As can be identified in the interview answers, participants that followed celebrities and influencers, purchased the products that they endorsed on their social media. It is noteworthy that in some cases, respondents admitted that they did not like the product after it has been received and used. However, none of the respondents felt misled into unsuccessful product purchase and viewed it as a typical situation in consumption experience. This thesis' research question was focused on identifying themes surrounding celebrity endorsement's parasocial influence on consumer behavior. Seven reoccurring themes were identified from the interview data.

4.2.1. Pursuing celebrity experience

Pursuing recreation of the "celebrity experience" was identified as the first common theme in consumer behavior. It is notable that many interview participants acknowledged that they are interested in spending their money to recreate the experience that celebrity disclosed to them on social media. It was revealed that several participants like to go to the celebrity-owned restaurants in order to repeat the experience that they saw on social media. Interview responses revealed that such experiences are pursued with great interest by the followers. Additionally, participants reported that they were willing to spend more money than they usually do while going to celebrity restaurants and personal brand shops in Moscow:

> *It is her (Olga Buzova's) restaurant, sometimes she goes here herself. I see her posting about this on her social media. I like to think that I can go and see what I see on social media in real life, it is an interesting experience. I posted about it and showed to my friends, so they can see this too.*
>
> *--Alexandra*
>
> *Elena Letuchaya (TV show host) has her own shop in Moscow and she posts about it quite often. She advertised her new daily planner in a video. I needed a new planner,*

I liked it and decided to go to the store to get it. It was interesting to see what other items she was selling, but I only bought the planner. She has a TV show "Revisorro", I watch it often. It is common for Moscow celebrities to open their own stores, I think that people come there out of curiosity and end up buying something. And it is quite expensive, you definitely paying for the name.

--Dariya

My nephew went to Olga Buzova's store in Moscow when he came here to visit me. He loved it, he thinks it is "cool" thing to do.

--Olesya

I like to go to Timati's (Russian rapper) burger restaurant. It is very popular in Moscow, everyone goes where because they know that he is the owner and they want to try what he offers. I also like the food, it is pretty good. There are always lines to this restaurant, he has a lot of fans and they support his business. I think that they also want to be seen at that place, post selfies from it. It is, in a way, part of the Moscow lifestyle.

--Elena

From these responses, it can be established that participants see recreation of advertised by celebrity experience as having a special value. This can be explained by The Meaning Transfer Model, that suggests that by purchasing the endorsed product (or in this case, experience), they get an opportunity to acquire celebrity qualities (McCracken, 1989). As explained by the author, followers see celebrities as successful people and they believe that they can also acquire positive celebrity qualities from product (or experience). Thus, the transfer process occurs between celebrity, experience they advertise and the consumer. McCracken (1989) argues that consumers look up to celebrities regarding guidance about how to gather desired characteristics from the product. In case of restaurant and celebrity shop promotions, celebrities offer guidance regarding how followers can re-live this experience just by posting about their own experience in these places. Thus, celebrity endorsers demonstrating how meaning can be obtained from the experience and enhance followers' status.

Marwick and Boyd (2011) argued that celebrity persuasion on their followers is further increased due to the feeling of intimacy reached by high level of self-disclosure of celebrity on their social media. As celebrities' posts reveal their personal daily lives (for example, showing their breakfast at restaurant or conversation with employees at the shop), celebrity-fan

communication on social media is perceived as engaging due to such personal nature of the posts (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). When celebrities post daily videos from restaurants, it engages the followers and it can seem very persuasive for them to want to reenact this activity. Additionally, such posts can create an illusion of closeness with celebrity—when followers see that celebrity just recently posted from the location in their city, it can influence them to go to the same place. Such strategy is frequently utilized by celebrities—it is a common marketing tactic to offer meet-and-greets, making it exciting for the followers to anticipate possibility to meet celebrity in person. Additionally, creating certain hash-tags can help to promote the experience as well—celebrities can comment on followers' tagged photos from their restaurants, which is also exciting for the followers.

Recent article suggested that emotional attachment to celebrity influenced followers to buy the endorsed product (Kowalzcyk & Pounders, 2016). This notion was reflected in several responses. One respondent purchased the planner with the celebrity she liked on the cover. Another respondent pinpointed that fans come to the celebrity restaurant because they want to support the artist's personal business. Participants admitted that they follow celebrities and their daily feed very closely. Such an attitude, combined with celebrities posting very personal, self-disclosive stories, might make endorsements seem very personally-oriented to the followers.

Chung and Cho (2017) suggest that stronger parasocial interactions are built by the regular social media interactions, full of celebrity's personal life updates and stories. Based on the interview responses, it can be argued that participants indeed talked about celebrities as if they personally knew them and developed connection with them. It seemed as if respondents were talking about a close friend, when retelling celebrity's personal stories that they saw on their social media. Interview responses suggest that participants built close relationships with followed social media celebrities and wanted to personally engage in their activities.

4.2.2. Establishing high level of trust with celebrity

Establishing high level of trust with celebrity was identified as the second theme regarding consumer behavior. The majority of participants made comments about trusting the endorser—they were certain that the endorser would not promote the product if it was of poor quality. One respondent emphasized that endorser would not do anything questionable to upset the subscribers. Recent article about parasocial interactions on social media suggests that strong

level of parasocial interactions leads to high level of endorser's perceived trust (Chung & Cho, 2017). It is notable that several respondents made comments revealing that they trust celebrities unquestionably, as if they personally knew them and were sure that they are endorsing high quality product. Chung and Cho (2017) argue that through regular interactions on social media, followers collect abundant information that is used to determine if they trust the celebrity. Additionally, Lueck (2015) proposes that celebrity, who is perceived as a trusted source, by incorporating personal stories about own experience with the product, makes the product desirable in the eyes of the followers.

I needed new foundation for the summer because mine was melting away, so I re-watched his older tutorials and bought also a primer he recommended. I felt like this altogether will resolve my issue. I was happy with a product, I knew that Jeffrey will not recommend something that does not work, he has his own brand and reputation to uphold. He has no reason to lie and at the end of the day, reputation is very important. If you lie online, the audience will expose you.

--Natalia

When you see some celebrity endorse something, cosmetics for example, when you are buying it, you already know in the back of your head, some percent of your judgment already agrees that this is a good quality product. If you look at it and you do not recognize it to be exceptional, then you think "but the celebrity liked it, so it cannot be that bad."

--Marina

I really liked her and thought she would not sell something bad.

--Kristina

My nephew is very easily influenced, he is 15. Whatever his favorite "idols" recommend, he will buy, and it is not cheap. He is 15. Olga Buzova advertised skin creme for blackheads and he bought it, never minding that 15 milliliters cost over 2,000 Rubles. He believes that this creme will work.

--Olesya

However, not all social media personalities were viewed as trustable. Respondents mentioned over-exposure of endorsement deals as a negative factor and said that they

unsubscribed from some endorsers because they did not feel sincerity in their promotions. Such comment is an example of celebrity endorsement literature's notion of level of credibility (Erdogan, 1999). In that case, credibility was estimated as low. However, it is important to point out that the way respondent referred to these social media endorsers suggests that she either does not follow them closely ("these girls") or has negative attitude towards them.

These girls from reality shows, all of them advertise everything, all the bad products. When you see advertising in every single post, this is beyond tiring. I think, it really depends what kind of celebrity you are. If you accomplished something, you probably will not advertise something random on your social media, it is below your status.

--Alla

For example, there are these blogger girls, all of them are advertising these Daniel Wellington watches. All of them do. For example, on Valentine's day they all posted on their social media about these watches. They all were like "look how cool this watch is". All of them did! Like you can clearly tell that the company sent all of them free watches and told them to push the watch to their subscribers. This is really irritating to me, because these watches are all over the place. I would definitely not buy it, even if I liked the watch, because the way it was pushed on me on social media. I just do not believe that it can be a good purchase.

--Alexandra

The same responded continued with her frustration:

I understand that getting free watch is awesome, but I would say that these vlogger girls should think first before engaging in such sponsorship. They really are crossing the line and risking losing their subscribers, just because you endorsed something bad or something that every other vlogger also endorsed. I think it is easy to cross this line and lose trust and respect of your subscribers.

--Alexandra

Even though parasocial interactions create an opportunity for building high level of trust with the followers, based on interviewees' responses and array of YouTube influencers' exposure scandals, it can be clearly observed that even one wrong decision can lead to backlash

and loss of followers' trust. In celebrity endorsement context, followers want to be confident that endorser does not promote the product solely for the reason of personal financial gain. Based on interview responses, participants suspect that some endorsers might knowingly promote low quality products.

Chung and Cho (2017) suggest that parasocial interactions are developed by regular celebrity-follower social media interactions. Authors argue that strong level of parasocial interactions increases endorsers' trustworthiness. In line with Chung and Cho's (2017) findings, responses suggest that when followers are aware that endorsers are promoting products for financial gain, this leads to low level of trust as well as rejection towards endorsers' attempted persuasion. Overall, identifying this theme makes it possible to suggest that parasocial interactions lead to financial success of endorsement, as it increases perceived level of endorser's trustworthiness. This is comparable to product recommendation made by a friend, which is perceived with trust.

4.2.3. Pursuing self-transformation through meaning-based consumption

Parasocial interactions theory states that the audience establishes wishful identification with observed celebrity (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). This statement is confirmed with the participants' responses and can be utilized in celebrity endorsement, as followers consider buying products that their favorite celebrity uses. It is argued that followers engage in parasocial interactions, that lead them to buy celebrity-endorsed products (Ballantine & Martin, 2005). Ballantine and Martin (2005) point out that fans tend to purchase the same items that celebrities they are found of, use. Participants' responses showcase that they are responsive to products suggested to them by endorsers. By pursuing such products, participants aimed to reach certain self-transformation. Belk (1984) argues that freedom of identification in modern days drives individuals to search for symbolic meanings in the product consumption. Celebrity endorsement literature suggests that celebrities are able to show their fans the way to reach their personal transformation, with the use of the endorsed products (McCracken, 1989).

Celebrities are offering their followers an opportunity to obtain these characteristics by purchasing an endorsed product. Celebrity endorsers' role is to demonstrate how meaning and personal characteristics can be extracted from the product and integrated to one's personality (McCracken, 1989). On social media, celebrities visually demonstrate their

followers both the example of self-transformation and the tools for such self-transformation—in the form of endorsed products. Celebrity's personal attributes create distinct meanings for the endorsed product (McCracken, 1989).

> *I think, if you simply like the person, have sympathy with them, want to be like them, then you want to buy what they advertise to you. It is like you are buying more than a product, you are buying an inspiration. Or, for example, if some style vloggers inspire you, advertise in a persuasive manner that speaks to you, you think "this looks like something I should have" and you buy it.*
>
> *--Elena*

> *I end up spending money to try new things I do not wear or use much. It is exciting to get that package and I can change my daily looks. It is like trying on different personas.*
>
> *--Diana*

> *I think that people see celebrities as examples of success and think that copying them in some manner can help them to be better than they are. They buy these same things celebrity has to improve their lives. For example, celebrity without the make-up on is not really a celebrity. I remember seeing a lot of celebrity without make-up photos in yellow press. There were pictures with and without make-up, the images were strikingly different. And celebrity without Birkin or Channel bag is not really a star neither. I think, we strive to copy them, we buy these things to buy the status. People are always trying to reach a higher status and seem more successful.*
>
> *--Alla*

Participants' responses are in line with McCracken's (1989) argument that consumers are constantly searching for products that offer them desired meanings. Consumers utilize these meanings to enhance themselves and the environment that they live in. It is evident that respondents were interested in the endorsed products because they represented certain ideas to them. McCracken (1989) pinpoints that another reason for product consumption is personal transformation, this reason is reflected in the responses. Additionally, it can be argued that process of consumers' personal transformation can be enhanced by parasocial interactions. Celebrities can be viewed as friends that have more sophisticated personal style and make-up skills, as displayed on their social media. Additionally, it can be argued that constant following visually communicates to fans the ways how personal transformation can be achieved.

As followers post their personal photos on social media too, their self-transformation efforts can receive instant gratification from positive comments and likes. According to Fromm and Garton (2013), Millennials tend to present themselves in a positive light, including sharing use of certain products on their social media, which supposed to improve their self-evaluation as well as gain approval in the eyes of their social network friends. It is noteworthy to point out that Russian Millennial respondents just started their working life, and many of them had moved to bigger cities for better work opportunities. These circumstances suggest that celebrity endorsement might have a considerable influence on them. According to McCracken (1989), individuals undergoing role change are significantly reliant on the meanings surrounding their new role and are potential consumers of the celebrity-endorsed products. This notion is reflected in the participants' responses. One of the respondents even referred to herself as a "marketing victim":

I am really a marketing victim, I can buy something just because some girl on Instagram advertised it. Maybe I will not actually buy it, but I will really want to buy it if I see it. I have to put an effort to stop myself.

--Alexandra

4.2.4. Adopting celebrity's lifestyle and habits

Adopting celebrity's lifestyle and habits is the fourth emerged theme regarding consumer behavior. As observed from participants' opinions about advertising, it is logical to assume that they would have negative attitude towards celebrity endorsement. However, when asked about their favorite celebrity and influencer's endorsement posts, the opinion expressed was quite the opposite of what was assumed. It was revealed that the followers are open to information provided by celebrity endorsements. When asked if they find social media endorsements to be irritating, most of respondents said that they do not mind it. Respondents stated that endorsements can be helpful for them by providing relevant information in form of beauty and style tips. This is in line with Lueck's (2015) argument that parasocial interactions lead followers to perceive celebrity's marketing efforts as a lifestyle guidance, thus followers pay close attention to them. Based on responses, it can be argued that followers are interested in learning how to maintain desired lifestyle from the celebrity. Lueck (2015) suggests that followers are willing to buy the items that celebrities endorse in order to obtain the desired lifestyle, displayed by the celebrities on their social media. They are open to receiving information about the items and how to use them to create aspired lifestyle.

I already said that, but it is very important to feel sympathetic with that person. If you feel this way, this person's choices seem like relatable to you. I think that she is good at what she does, she also has stylists and make-up artists, too. If she likes this product, maybe I will like this product too.

--Alisa

She travels a lot and maintains minimalism lifestyle to be able to go to destination on the spur of the moment. I do not travel that much, but she gives very practical advice that works. I think a lot recently about how to simplify my life by getting rid of unnecessary things in my house. I agree with her idea that the less you have, the easier your life is. When I go on vacation, it takes me the whole week to properly pack my luggage. I end up taking too much and not even wearing it. I want to change this.

--Valeriya

I follow Jeffrey Starr on Instagram and YouTube, I do not have his Snapchat. I do not really like make up that much, I am more there for the funny content. He always has very bizarre opinions on life. But I have bought some cosmetics he reviewed, like skin care and lip balms, he knows all about it.

--Alla

I like the advice she gives about being confident, develop your own style and show it in your outfits. She also has a beautiful house, she decorated and picked all the interior herself. She shows how to decorate for each holiday season as well. I like the variety of videos she posts. I do not do yoga myself yet, but I feel like I should start. Kalyn (YouTuber) really thinks about all aspects of life, I feel that I am learning a lot from her videos.

--Marina

According to these responses, it can be proposed that lifestyle guidance is actively pursued by social media followers. Several respondents showcased their interest in following public figures to learn from them, including learning about what is needed in order to have certain lifestyle. As participants are looking up to public figures as lifestyle gurus, this can be utilized by endorsing products relevant to the lifestyle that their followers are aspired to adopt. It is important to point out that McCormick's (2016) findings revealed that Millennials did not

exhibit purchase intentions towards products endorsed by the celebrity they did not know, making social media's role in popularizing celebrities more important. Fromm and Garton (2013) state that if individual has practical knowledge in certain area, this is enough for him/her to be considered as an expert by Millennials. These statement helps to explain why celebrity's advice is popular on social media and why it can lead to financial success of endorsement. Additionally, consumers look for similarity in endorser's lifestyle and activities and if they find it, endorsers' communication messages are evaluated as more cohesive by consumers (Erdogan, 1999).

4.2.5. Fulfilling the need to belong

Fifth emerged theme, fulfilling the need to belong, reflects theoretical framework's factor influencing parasocial interactions (Escalas & Bettman, 2017). Followers responded that they like to share their experiences online with photos and hashtags for the other fans to see and comment on. Desire to connect to other people could also be identified in a choice to wear certain fan merchandise—followers pointed out that they like to express themselves by certain clothing. Escalas and Bettman (2017) stated that consumers utilize celebrity meanings for the sense of belonging. The authors pointed out that individuals susceptible to parasocial interactions are more likely to pay close attention to the celebrities, since they are seeking celebrity guidance about what products can fulfil their need to belong. The respondents stated the following:

> *I follow different YouTube channels. I ordered merchandise from them couple of times, mostly t-shirts. I saw them advertised and I decided I should get something for myself. It is nice to have them because people who watch same channels know where I got them from, so they watch what I watch and we can have a conversation about it.*
>
> *--Vera*

> *I like to go there sometimes, it is interesting to see other people who like Timati. One time me and my friends went where, and we talked to people at the other table for the whole time, it was a lot of fun.*
>
> *--Elena*

Also, it is cool to see that they wear same brand you wear, you have something in common. You will be pleasantly surprised that they have the same shoes that you have.

--Kristina

I think if people have a need to be similar to somebody, then yes, they are really influenced by celebrities. I think at some point, they do not even realize why they buy this brand, it is unconscious. *--Marina*

The authors advice marketers to follow today's popular trends among Millennials, as they follow these trends very closely and base their purchase decisions on what is currently popular among their peers (Fromm & Garton, 2013). Peer pressure experienced by Millennials regarding what products to choose and what style of clothes to wear, might be seen as an outcome of a need to belong. Escalas and Bettman (2017) state that consumers displaying high need to belong are more susceptible to celebrity's parasocial interactions. Based on the responses, it is possible to suggest that Millennials are utilizing consumer products to find new ways to express themselves, as well as to connect to other people and find similarities with them. Consumers can fulfill their need to belong by purchasing products from the company that celebrity they identify with endorse for, since parasocial interactions lead them to believe that if this product is suitable for this celebrity, it is suitable for them as well.

4.2.6. Stepping outside the consumption comfort zone

Another theme revealed based on the interview responses is that followers are willing to try new products, even though they never bought them before. This can be explained by celebrity endorsement theory—message from the credible source impacts attitudes and behavior of consumers by affecting consumers' values and opinions (Erdogan, 1999). Additionally, Perse and Rubin (1989) point out that persuasive effect of parasocial interactions is based on their ability to reduce viewers' uncertainty. Thus, followers engaged in parasocial interactions with celebrity are willing to try new products, since they trust the judgement of celebrity and no longer see the purchase as risky. This finding is in line with argument that Millennials are a generation that is adventurous for new experiences, including with the products that they choose (Fromm & Garton, 2013). Interesting observation is that decision to

try new product can lead to the negative consequences. However, respondents stated that they did not blame the endorser for recommending unsuitable product. Instead, they viewed negative outcome as an unavoidable part of the consumer experience.

But if they endorse something that I am already interested in, I already was paying attention to, or something that I never even knew existed, and they show it to me, then I would most probably be interested in that.

--Natalia

He has his own brand, but it is mostly stuff I do not really use, like lipsticks. I wanted to order it once but then decided not to, what would I do with it later? Maybe I will buy it for a friend or something. I honestly just want to do it and see what happens. Get the package and unpack it, see if it has a sticker or some kind of card in it. I think in his videos he talked about having a card in all his products.

--Alla

If I see something I want to buy online, I go and check the buyers' reviews first, I would not just go ahead and blindly buy it. However, when I bought Lady Gaga's perfume, I just did it. But, of course, I went to the store and smelled their scent first. So, it was not a blind purchase. However, I did not previously used this type of scent before, so that was unusual for me and I liked it.

--Alexandra

Celebrity endorsement literature points out that celebrity's established public recognition increases the chance that consumers will try the new product, even though they are not guaranteed to like it; consumers are willing to take this risk, since they trust the celebrity (Erdogan, 1999). This can be compared to a friend's recommendation that can make individuals more willing to experiment and step outside their consumption comfort zone. This notion is in line with Millennials' openness for experimenting with the products, especially if they are recommended by friends (Fromm & Garton, 2013).

However, not all the participants had positive experience while shopping for endorsed products. One participant mentioned that on several occasions, social media endorser lead her to temporary change of opinion and wrong consumer decisions. The participant shared a story of how she tried new cosmetics that had positive reviews, but eventually went back to her old

71

products. Even though she admitted to regretting the purchase, she did not blame the social media personality for influencing her towards making the wrong decision. The participant said that she still trusted the endorser. Followers might not even blame the public figure, like in participant's story, and blame the unfortunate purchase on other circumstances.

> *I always buy Estee Lauder products, but was thinking "why is it so expensive, what am I paying for?" I do not remember who endorsed Urban Decay cosmetics, but I saw someone I follow saying good things about it. So, I was thinking maybe I should try using these cosmetics too. I went to the store, looked at some necessity products and bought them. But eventually I went back to using Estee Lauder because I found Urban Decay to be of much lower quality. I feel like social media temporarily clouded my judgement and I bought from different cosmetics line I never tried before, but I went back to my old products.*
>
> *--Alla*

> *I do not think the influencer had bad intentions in promoting it, I just think it is not for my skin type. It is what it is.*
>
> *--Alla*

4.2.7. Actively pursuing higher level of attractiveness

Last theme is related to one of the factors of both celebrity endorsement as well as parasocial interactions (McGuire, 1985; Turner, 1993). Based on participants' responses, it is evident that they are heavily influenced by social media. Participants admitted to comparing their own lives to the lives of people they follow; based on such comparisons, they estimated their self-worth. Additionally, participants use social media to increase their self-worth, based on the "likes" and comments they receive on their personal pages. This, in turn, puts a pressure on social media users to self-censor and post only the photographs and videos that show them during their best moments. Particularly, this was related to participants' appearance: make-up, hair, body and clothes they wear.

Most of the participants acknowledged that they care very deeply about what information they release on social media. They admitted that they take multitude of selfies to capture the "perfect" shot. Additionally, participants stated that they like to spend time carefully editing the photo and thinking of a clever caption for it. Participants admitted to deleting certain photos, especially the ones that were taken long time ago, if they found themselves not looking as attractive back then as they do now. This is in line with notion that the majority of Russian Instagram posts are focused on fashion, beauty and products related to them (Russian Search Marketing, 2016). Additionally, this source stated that in Russian culture, brand names and personal appearance are of great importance. Participants acknowledged that they are very interested in enhancing their looks. Their aspiration for higher level of attractiveness was fulfilled by paying close attention to celebrities and products that they endorsed. Ohanian (1990) stated that the more consumers evaluates endorser as attractive, the more effective is endorser's persuasion.

If I see influencer wearing a beautiful dress, I would like to buy something similar with the same design. I have a dress in military color, with golden buttons, like dress-jacket, really beautiful. I saw influencer wearing similar dress with that design and I really liked it. It was not an advertisement, so I had to find something like that in a store myself. I wanted something identical, I liked the "look" itself. Instagram is helpful for looking up good clothes.

--Diana

I think girls always try to look up to the girl they think is prettier than them, never minding if she is a celebrity or not. But celebrities usually look better.

--Natalia

I have to say that my make-up changed a lot during recent years. I never used fake eyelashes before or went to salon to get my eyebrows and nails done. I think social media and beauty gurus are very influential for what is perceived as beautiful. Everyone is following the trends, salons get a lot of business and it is very expensive. I do not think it is a big problem, but I feel like I am expected to look put-together all the time, especially at work or in public.

--Olesya

73

Spry, Pappu and Cornwell (2011) include celebrity's attractiveness as one of the building blocks of celebrity's credibility. Since social media is heavily based on the visual aspect and the "looks" of the users serve as a basis for decision to follow, the notion of evaluation of credibility partially based on attractiveness, is reflected. According to celebrity endorsement literature, high level of celebrity attractiveness leads to better performance of products (Kahle & Homer, 1985). Celebrities with high level of attractiveness are more likely to attract consumers' attention, as well as change their attitudes towards the product. Research suggested that consumers tend to show high level of involvement with celebrities with high level of attractiveness. Additionally, high level of attraction to media persona serves as a factor predicting stronger parasocial interactions (Turner, 1993). By taking these notions into account, it is possible to see that attractiveness is perceived as an important factor for determining individual's success in the world of social media. This can explain why followers are motivated to improve their physical appearance as well. It is possible to conclude that the rise of the social media caused its users to feel more self-conscious, as well as made the society view personal appearance as something of great importance. In turn, this influences followers to pursue higher level of attractiveness and pay attention to celebrity endorsements that are aimed to facilitate such aspirations.

4.3. Results and reevaluation of theoretical framework

Exploring how parasocial interactions shape consumer behavior constitutes this thesis' research purpose. In order to address this purpose, literature review was conducted based on the theory of celebrity endorsement and theory of parasocial interactions. Theoretical framework was constructed based on the factors addressing characteristics of successful endorser and factors determining the strength of parasocial interactions. Original theoretical framework can be found in Figure 1. This figure visually showcased the factors that potentially play role in celebrity endorsement's influence on consumer behavior. Both celebrity endorsement and parasocial interactions theories served as a source for factors that were utilized in interpreting the findings, as well as making sense of the emerged themes.

Based on these factors, it was possible to identify, understand and produce an explanation of how consumer behaviors are shaped by parasocial influence of celebrity endorsers. Parasocial interactions' factors were utilized in the process of distinguishing

common themes in participants' consumer behavior. If these factors were identified in participants' answers as influencing their consumer behavior, they were used in the creation and analysis of the themes that they related to. Such factors as trustworthiness, attractiveness, lifestyle guidance and need to belong were reflected in emerged data so distinctly and were found to be so influential on consumer behavior, that they transformed into a theme (establishing high level of trust with celebrity, actively pursuing higher level of attractiveness, adopting celebrity's lifestyle and habits, fulfilling the need to belong).

In order to reflect the theoretical framework with the empirical data, twelve Russian Millennial participants were selected. Interview data reflected most of the factors outlined in synthesis of the theoretical framework. However, the interviews revealed that some factors were more prominent than the others, at least according to the interview responses. Seven themes describing how parasocial interactions shape consumer behavior of Russian Millennials were distinguished. These themes are illustrated below in Figure 3. During conduction of the interviews, participants revealed that multiple factors of celebrity endorsement and parasocial interactions influenced their perceptions of these endorsements; these factors will be further discussed in detail.

First of all, it is important to point out that McCracken's 1989 Meaning Transfer Model was applicable to analyzing multitude of respondents' answers. It was clear that participants assign certain meanings to celebrities that they follow, and they believe that these meanings are transferred to the product endorsed by these celebrities. Associative Network Memory Model (Spry, Pappu & Cornwell, 2011) was found to be irrelevant in this research. Role of associations in celebrity endorsement was only addressed in discussion of hidden advertisement—respondents pinpointed that they notice it when celebrities are wearing different brands in their social media photos. Even though celebrities do not officially name these brands in the hash-tags and captions, followers are still able to tell what these brands are and start to associate these brands with celebrity. Additionally, as topic of brand perceptions was later omitted from this thesis, this made Associative Network Memory Model irrelevant part of the theoretical framework even further.

In the first section of this chapter, various participants' quotes were showcased to illustrate participants' opinions about social media use and its various aspects. Several observations were made during warm-up questions that are related to the main focus of this research. It was revealed that social media became part of Millennials' daily life and they were spending large amount of time on various social media platforms even at work. Taking this

notion into account, it is possible to confirm that marketing experts are indeed in a great need to find efficient ways to promote products to Millennial consumers on social media. Additionally, almost all the respondents expressed a very negative reaction to the "traditional" advertisement on social media. Thus, it is evident that marketers have to find different, engaging ways to draw social media followers' attention to the products (Shin & Lin, 2016). Based on interview data, it can be concluded that celebrity endorsement is an effective way to promote products to Russian Millennial consumers, as all of them admitted to previously buying products endorsed by celebrities on their social media.

All aspects of endorser outlined by the theoretical framework were reflected in the interview data. Motives to endorse product were important to followers, some of them brought up an issue of authenticity and stated that they will not purchase the product from celebrity or endorser if they feel that they promote it only for money. Similar to this notion, product-celebrity fit also played an important role for followers (Kamins, 1990). Participants revealed that there must be a match between product and endorser, otherwise such marketing attempts will not be evaluated as convincing.

Main three endorsers aspects emphasized in celebrity endorsement literature (attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness) were reflected in the interview data (Spry, Pappu & Cornwell, 2011). Even though it was not possible to establish what aspects followers find to be most important, all of them were mentioned in one way or the other during the interviews. Respondents revealed that they think that celebrities are successful, attractive people, possessing special skills as well as high level of reputation in the society. These skills were one of the reasons why followers were interested in following their daily feeds. Additionally, established reputation was perceived by the followers as a guarantee that endorsed product will deliver on its promises.

Such notions as likability, familiarity and similarity were reflected in the interview data as well (McGuire, 1985). Respondents subscribed to the social media personalities based on their likability. If, for some reason, public figure was no longer likable in the eyes of the follower, they unsubscribed. Familiarity played a role as well, followers had previously encountered public figures they subscribed to, be it in on the movie screens, pages of magazines or in music videos. Interestingly, it was revealed that basic level of familiarity could be established based on personal relationships between one celebrity and the other. For example, if one YouTuber was friends with the other, follower was more likely to subscribe to the other YouTuber as well, based on personal recommendation of the YouTuber. Followers revealed
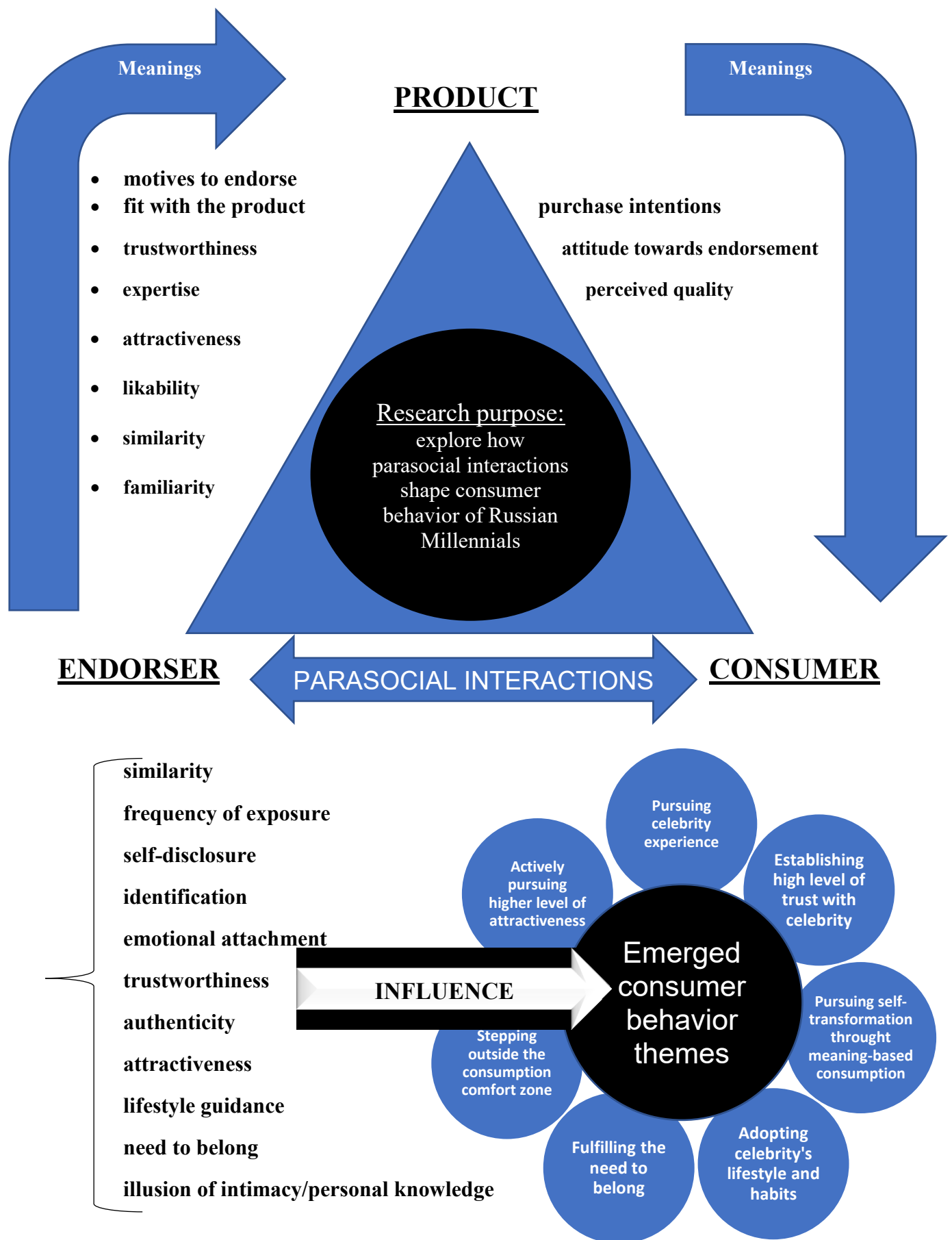
PRODUCT

Meanings

Meanings

- **motives to endorse**
- **fit with the product**
- **trustworthiness**
- **expertise**
- **attractiveness**
- **likability**
- **similarity**
- **familiarity**

purchase intentions

attitude towards endorsement

perceived quality

Research purpose: explore how parasocial interactions shape consumer behavior of Russian Millennials

ENDORSER

PARASOCIAL INTERACTIONS

CONSUMER

similarity

frequency of exposure

self-disclosure

identification

emotional attachment

trustworthiness

authenticity

attractiveness

lifestyle guidance

need to belong

illusion of intimacy/personal knowledge

INFLUENCE

Emerged consumer behavior themes

Pursuing celebrity experience

Actively pursuing higher level of attractiveness

Establishing high level of trust with celebrity

Stepping outside the consumption comfort zone

Pursuing self-transformation throught meaning-based consumption

Fulfilling the need to belong

Adopting celebrity's lifestyle and habits

Figure 3. Theoretical framework reevaluation.

that they were not likely to subscribe to somebody new without previously established level of familiarity. Similarity as an aspect was commonly distinguished both in celebrity endorsement as well as in parasocial interactions theory (Erdogan, 1999; Horton & Wohl, 1956). Several respondents acknowledged that similarity plays a role in their decision to follow public figure, be it similarity in terms of appearance, personal characteristics or hobbies.

In terms of effect of celebrity endorsement on the follower, theoretical framework distinguished the following influence: purchase intentions, attitude towards endorsement, brand associations, brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality (Bergkvist, Hjalmarson & Mägi, 2016; Chung & Cho, 2017; Spry *et al.,* 2011). Out of all these influences, purchase intentions, attitude towards endorsement and perceived quality were identified in the participants' responses. Additionally, during later stages of writing this thesis, it was decided not to include effects of celebrity influence on followers' brand perception, thus, brand associations, brand awareness and brand loyalty were not the focus of this research. All participants revealed that they purchased celebrity endorsed products at least once. Fact of purchasing celebrity-endorsed product served as a pre-selection requirement for participants. Participants showcased positive attitude towards endorsements shared by followed by them celebrities on social media. As revealed in "Adopting celebrity lifestyle and habits" theme, celebrity endorsements are viewed more as a lifestyle guidance versus annoying advertisement and is received with attention. This notion is very important for modern marketing as it reveals an effective way to advertise to Russian Millennials, and, probably, Millennials in general.

It is noteworthy that several respondents unsubscribed from celebrities that behave in unacceptable manner. It is possible to suggest that Russian Millennials expect appropriate behavior from social media celebrities. This finding can be viewed as a possible factor affecting strength of parasocial interactions, not identified by the previous literature. However, further research is necessary to investigate how appropriate, approved by the society manner of behavior in endorser affects their parasocial interactions with the followers. This finding is complimentary to the notion that it is extremely important for the companies to select the right endorser for the product, because in case the endorser carries negative meaning, it will ultimately transfer to the company (White, Goddard & Wilbur, 2009). Last aspect, perceived quality, was reflected in the interview data as well. Several participants noted in "Establishing high level of trust with the celebrity" theme, that celebrity-endorsed products were evaluated to be of high quality. Such evaluation was based on popular among the respondents belief that public figures will not risk their personal reputation by promoting low-quality product.

In terms of the main notions in parasocial interactions, all of them were reflected during conduction of the interviews: similarity, identification, authenticity, frequency of exposure, emotional attachment, attractiveness, engagement, illusion of intimacy/personal knowledge, lifestyle guidance, need to belong/conformity. As these notions were already discussed in the previous section, only a short overview will be provided here, concluding how these factors shape consumer behavior based on the interview findings. Similarity/ identification allows followers to imagine themselves wearing the clothes endorsed by the public figure, which, in turn, can lead them to the decision to purchase. Participants answered that they follow some celebrities that look similar to them, this also can help the endorsement, since it makes product promotion more visual.

Authenticity was very important for respondents, as it allowed them to see that endorser advertises something he/she is actually using and is sincere about it. Respondents made a point that they see a public figure endorsing too many products as inauthentic. Based on the responses about amount of time spend on social media on a daily basis, it is possible to conclude that participants are being constantly exposed to array of celebrity feeds. This exposure further develops parasocial interactions, that, in turn, increases likelihood of purchase of endorsed products. Emotional attachment, attraction and engagement with public figure all can be identified in participants' responses. Parasocial interaction theory is essentially based on the notion that audience believes that they possess personal knowledge of public figures, thus, illusion of intimacy is created by the process of viewing (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Overall, theoretical framework was strongly reflected in the collected interviews and played a vital role in guiding this research, analyzing the findings and identifying the emerged themes.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1. Summary

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how parasocial interactions shape consumer behavior of Russian Millennials. Consumer perspective was the focus of this research and it was necessary to gain insights into Russian Millennials' social media use as well as their evaluation of celebrity endorsements. In this thesis, a person possessing public recognition and utilizing it for product endorsement is referred to as celebrity endorser. Research purpose has been addressed by the following research question:

- What themes emerge from parasocial interactions' influence on consumer behavior of Russian Millennials?

As theoretical knowledge about parasocial interactions does not provide an explanation of how parasocial interactions shape consumer behavior, it was decided to explore this issue by conduction of semi-structured interviews. Recent marketing literature identified that parasocial interactions are believed to increase buying intentions, however, parasocial interactions' role in consumer decision-making process has not yet been clearly defined (Chung & Cho, 2017). Theoretical framework of this thesis was based on two streams of literature—celebrity endorsement and parasocial interactions. Several recent celebrity endorsement marketing articles suggested that parasocial interactions theory is helpful to address the above-mentioned research gap (Chung & Cho, 2017; Lueck, 2015). These recent research articles state that parasocial interactions positively effect followers' product perceptions and consequently lead to purchase intentions.

Concepts in celebrity endorsement source effect were combined with concepts in parasocial interactions theory. Meaning-Transfer Model (McCracken, 1989), Associative Network Memory Model (Spry, Pappu & Cornwell, 2011), Source Attractiveness Model (McGuire, 1985) and Source Credibility Model (Hovland & Weiss, 1951) were utilized in the construction of the theoretical framework. Influential endorsers' characteristics according to

each model were compiled as factors of endorsers' effectiveness. Factors determining strength of parasocial interactions were added based on parasocial interactions theory. These concepts have been synthesized in theoretical framework to fully explore the phenomenon of celebrity's parasocial influence on their followers. Additionally, literature on Millennials' consumption behavior has been reviewed to identify characteristics of this generation.

Recent research articles point out that new social media context demands further investigation regarding parasocial interactions (Lueck, 2015). Public figures' social media self-presentation is important, since it opens the door for engaging with potential consumers of the endorsed products. Empirical data regarding celebrities' characteristics and social media behaviors was collected by conducting interviews, as it was identified as potentially beneficial for facilitating the research purpose. Interview explored how social media users evaluate endorsers' characteristics and communication attempts. Interviews primarily examined reasons why Russian Millennials follow certain endorsers on social media and what they think about their endorsements.

Social constructionism paradigm serves as a basis for this thesis; social constructionism views reality as a product of cognitive and social processes (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Social constructionism is a leading paradigm in interpretive research (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). This paradigm seemed as an appropriate choice since subjective perceptions of celebrity endorsers and their endorsements were under examination; these perceptions are developed based on social interactions. This research is based on ontological assumption that the reality is constructed by the individuals, it is plural and holistic (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). Thus, the reality cannot be objectively analyzed, but only experienced and understood by an individual. Thus, reality has a subjective nature and is based on individual's understanding of it.

Gummesson (2005) suggests that the researcher should utilize reflexivity and common sense in order to interpret the phenomenon. Research findings are dependent on socio-historic context of their construction process, thus, influenced by the researcher, who is also an interpreter of these findings. Knowledge cannot be absolute; however, research findings allow to produce plausible interpretation of the phenomenon under question. Gummesson (2005) pinpoints that data is generated and not just collected. Since data of this thesis is related to socially constructed phenomenon, it is implied that the researcher is co-producing the data together with the respondents. Empirical data is interpreted by the researcher and the findings are affected by researcher's subjective perception.

As the main purpose of this thesis is to explore how parasocial interactions shape consumer behavior, it is necessary to understand how consumers build perceptions of these celebrities, as well as how they evaluate the products that they endorse. Quantitative method was not chosen for this study, as there was no need to measure the phenomenon in this research. Instead, context and verbal descriptions surrounding the celebrity endorsement and parasocial interactions phenomena were examined. While quantitative research examines the phenomenon by testing hypothesis and collecting the numerical data, qualitative research is aimed at reaching an understanding based on the interpreting and analyzing of the meanings surrounding this phenomenon (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

Gummesson (2005) points out that interpretation, analysis and data collection are simultaneous in qualitative research. Theoretical framework of this thesis was constructed simultaneously with the conduction of the interviews and generation of the empirical data. Gummesson (2005) points out that non-linear process of generating research knowledge is referred to as hermeneutic spiral. Hermeneutic approach is applied in the interpretation process, when the researcher moves between already obtained knowledge and the new knowledge, from pre-understanding to enhanced understanding of the phenomenon.

Interview data was collected from twelve Russian Millennial participants. Participants were chosen from interviewer's acquaintances from high school. Respondents are 25-28 years old, with various educational background and working in various positions in Rybinsk, Moscow, Saint Petersburg and Yaroslavl. Semi-structured interviews were conducted either in person or via Skype. List of guiding questions used during the interviews is located in the appendices section. Data collected included reasons for subscribing and unsubscribing to celebrities, opinions on social media endorsements, attractive and unattractive celebrity characteristics, factors influencing the purchase, among others. Research purpose was addressed by the question—what themes emerge from parasocial interactions' influence on consumer behavior of Russian Millennials? Overall, seven common themes regarding how parasocial interactions shape consumer behavior were outlined. These themes serve as a vehicle to addressing the research purpose of this thesis.

Emerged themes include pursuing celebrity experience, establishing high level of trust with celebrity, pursuing self-transformation through meaning-based consumption, adopting celebrity's lifestyle and habits, fulfilling the need to belong, stepping outside the consumption comfort zone, actively pursuing higher level of attractiveness. In conclusion, it is possible to see that parasocial interactions play a vital role in influencing social media followers' consumer

behavior. This research shows that Millennials are looking to experiment with their products, as pointed out by Fromm and Garton (2013). However, as findings suggest and in line with Henrie and Taylor (2009)**,** Millennials express very negative attitude towards forceful advertising and are trying to avoid it. In line with Hung (2014), and based on the responses, it can be concluded that celebrity endorsement is an effective way to promote the product on social media.

Several conclusions regarding how parasocial interactions shape consumer behavior have been reached in this thesis. First of all, it is possible to suggest that parasocial interactions increase responsiveness to celebrity endorsement. Respondents did not express negative attitudes towards celebrity endorsements' posts from the celebrities they like to follow on a regular basis, thus, parasocially engaged with. They perceived it with interest, more as a lifestyle guidance, in line with Lueck (2015), as well as looked up to celebrities to learn how specific characteristics could be obtained from the endorsed product, as argued by McCracken (1989). Secondly, the research revealed that parasocial interactions influence consumers to want to recreate the experience of the endorser, both with products that they use and places that they go to (restaurants, personal stores). This could be explained by parasocial interactions theory's notion proposed by Horton and Wohl (1956), stating that the audience is interested in obtaining further likeness with the celebrities by purchasing the same products that they use.

Thirdly, parasocial interactions allow consumers to feel strong sense of belonging with celebrity as well as with other followers. This was revealed by several interviews in which respondents pointed out that they are interested in communicating with the other followers of this celebrity. Recent research by Escalas and Bettman (2017) suggested that high need to belong displayed by the consumers leads them to higher susceptibility to parasocial interactions and, in turn, causes them to be more responsive to endorser's influence. Fourthly, the findings suggest that parasocial interactions create high level of trust towards endorsement. Participants' responses suggested that if the product was endorsed by a celebrity they parasocially interact with on social media, they trust that the product will deliver on its promises. This is in line with recent research by Chung and Cho (2017) which proposed that regular interactions on social media allow followers to collect abundant information and decide if they trust a certain celebrity. Participants reasoned that celebrity's public reputation serves as a guarantee that endorsed product is of high quality. Fifthly, research revealed that parasocial interactions with celebrities aspire followers to pursue higher level of attractiveness. Participants pay close attention to beauty, fashion and fitness tips, as well as the products celebrities use and endorse.

5.2. Theoretical contribution

The chosen research topic is relatively new to the context of the social media and researchers just started to develop parasocial interactions topic in this direction. It is important to point out that most of the research conducted with parasocial interactions utilized the quantitative approach, thus, it was decided that it can be beneficial to implement qualitative approach and examine the phenomenon by different research means. By conducting interviews and identifying common patterns in the acquired responses, it was possible to recognize similarities in participants' perceptions of celebrities and their endorsements. Conducted research produced seven insightful themes to help the understanding of parasocial interactions and their influence on consumer behavior.

In terms of the context, contribution has been made primarily due to the lack of research on parasocial interactions previously conducted with Russian participants, to the best of the researcher's knowledge. It is important to point out that there has been no academic research found regarding Russian Millennials in preparation of this thesis. As there has been no previous research done in the context of utilizing celebrity endorsement in promoting to Russian Millennials specifically, findings of this research contribute to the marketing knowledge about Russian Millennial consumers. Thus, cultural background of this thesis contributes to both parasocial interactions and celebrity endorsement knowledge. Another contribution has been made from applying parasocial interactions theory to the context of social media, as well as to the context of marketing, particularly, to celebrity endorsement. This thesis contributed to the understanding of parasocial interactions' influence and provided a deeper understanding of how these interactions shape consumer behavior. As pointed out by Lueck (2015), applying parasocial interactions to marketing context is a novel approach, and it allows to build foundation for the new theory surrounding new type of advertising on social media.

This research contributes to both parasocial interactions and celebrity endorsement literature by providing consumers' perspectives of persuasiveness of social media endorsements. One of the themes of this thesis' findings is in line with Chung and Cho's (2017) outcomes, pointing out that marketing value could be found in further exploring parasocial interactions on social media, as they were found to increase source trust and, consequently, increase likelihood of consumers' purchase intentions. Since this thesis was built on social constructionism paradigm, its focus is on the celebrity endorsement as a social construction and it strives for deeper understanding of how social media followers respond to celebrities, their

content and marketing attempts on the social media platforms. This thesis is focusing on analyzing the psychological nuances of celebrity endorsement together with parasocial influence on the consumers.

5.3. Practical implications of the research

Research in marketing can be accessed based on the practical utility of the obtained knowledge. Possessing a better understanding of parasocial influence mechanisms in social media endorsements would improve marketers' expertise and, potentially, the financial success of the endorsements. As outlined in the introduction, emergence of social media calls for new ways to market to the consumers. One of the new ways to do so is through social media celebrity endorsement. Thus, this thesis was focused on the patterns in consumer behavior that can shed the light on how to make social media celebrity endorsement even more persuasive to the consumers.

It is important to point out that in modern days, celebrity culture is much more accessible to the public than before, especially through the use of social media. Taking into account how social media operates and allows the users to connect with each other and discuss certain celebrity, creates an opportunity for the companies to market to this group of people with high return on investments, since this group is so concentrated. Additionally, it was beneficial to explore how the online behavior of consumers is different from their shopping behavior in the brick-and-mortar stores.

According to the goal of this research, the outcomes were expected to provide a better understanding of parasocial interactions' influence on consumer behavior. Additionally, the findings provide insights into how followers evaluate social media endorsers and endorsed products. It is beneficial for marketers to acquire these insights in order to plan social media endorsements more efficiently and choose suitable endorsers. Last but not least, guidelines about competent social media behavior for endorsers can be outlined based on the interview responses.

Most of the respondents pointed out that they dislike advertising and choose to avoid it, thus, it is evident that traditional ways of promoting should be replaced by more efficient ways, such as celebrity endorsement. However, followers' trust must be maintained by celebrities choosing endorsements wisely and not engaging with non-related products. As

followers view celebrities that are endorsing products only for financial gain or endorsing products that are incoherent with celebrities' image as inauthentic, it is necessary to evaluate whether followers might perceive future endorsement with negativity. It is advisable to pay attention to followers' comments to see what their current perceptions are and, if they are negative, it is important to understand why. Based on this understanding, it is possible to resolve the issue or avoid making similar mistakes in the future.

As pointed out by Lueck (2015), attachment to celebrity leads to emotional response to endorsed product and increases purchase intentions. In this thesis, it was revealed that followers see celebrities that they emotionally engage with as trustable and are willing to purchase their products without hesitation. Lueck (2015) pointed out that followers already constitute an audience well-acquainted with particular celebrity and susceptible to their parasocial interactions. Marketers can reach out to certain celebrities based on the kind of audience these celebrities attract and promote their products to appropriate target demographics.

It is essential to have an insight into what meanings followers attach to the celebrity and the endorsed products. Paying attention to the comments, as well as consistently following public opinion in the celebrity's fan communities and media outlets, allows marketing team to keep updated about current trends and social dynamics. Making marketing decisions based on this information is extremely important, since it allows to prevent public backlash and financial loss. As followers are open to try new products, it creates wide possibilities for the marketers to utilize celebrity endorsement to the full potential. The biggest opportunity can be identified in endorsement of beauty and fashion products, since followers revealed a great interest in enhancing their physical appearance.

It is possible to find social significance in this thesis' research findings, that is not related to marketing of the products. Parasocial interactions can be utilized for promoting various social causes and charities on social media using celebrities as spokespeople. Even though it is possible to assume that there will be different aspects surrounding promotion of social causes using parasocial interactions versus promotion of consumer products, the nature of parasocial interactions phenomenon remains the same in both cases. Further studying this phenomenon and applying it to social media context will reveal more efficient ways to utilize parasocial interactions for the purpose of communicating with the masses.

5.4. Limitations

It is necessary to acknowledge limitations of this thesis. Gummesson (2005) pinpoints that data is generated and not just collected. Since data of this thesis is related to socially constructed phenomenon, it is implied that the researcher is co-producing the data together with the respondents. The research is focused only on the consumers' perspective and such focus does not provide the full representation of the parasocial interactions phenomenon. Additionally, in this thesis participants were pre-selected by the researcher. The questions and the participants' answers might have deficiencies. As the participants responded to personal questions, self-reported answers only showcase what participants were willing to reveal to the researcher. Respondents might not be comfortable to fully disclose their answers on all the questions. It is important to acknowledge that such data can be misleading and deceptive. For example, in case that participants were unwilling to respond to the answer or felt uncomfortable in doing so, they might have provided answers that were not authentic. However, it was specifically mentioned to the respondents that they can disregard any questions that they feel uncomfortable answering. However, use of the personal stories helped in following respondents' logic, making it possible to get better insights into consumers' minds.

First of all, empirical data was collected from the interviews with only twelve participants. It can be argued that limited number of participants would not make research findings generalizable. However, research findings could benefit future research as parasocial interactions theory has only recently started to be considered relevant to the topic of celebrity endorsement. Secondly, all interview participants are Russian, and it is possible to argue that research findings are only representative of the Russian population. The cultural element plays a role in findings as Russians most probably have their own perspectives on social media, celebrities and celebrity endorsements. Thirdly, all participants belong to Millennial cohort, thus, the findings might not be generalizable to other generations of consumers. Additionally, it is arguable who can be considered as Millennial. This thesis is based on Fromm and Garton's (2013) definition of Millennials as individuals born between 1977 and 1995. The majority of the respondents are between ages 25-28 and this age group only comprises a part of the Millennial generation. Fourthly, there is no distinction made in this thesis between celebrities and social media influencers, which makes it impossible to identify differences in parasocial interactions that these individuals establish with their followers. Fifthly, this thesis did not focus on any particular social media platform as it was decided to let participants choose what

platforms they want to discuss. Thus, no observations or findings could be collected regarding any specific social media platform. Sixthly, even though celebrity endorsement is focusing on both product and brand promotion, it was decided to limit this thesis to only examining product promotion.

5.5. Further research directions

This thesis' theoretical framework consisted of the combination of celebrity endorsement and parasocial interactions literature. It is advised that future research focuses on further combining these literature streams in order to thoroughly analyze such complex and multifaceted subject as parasocial influence of celebrity endorsement. As current market is oversaturated with various products and all of them compete for attention of the consumer, it is necessary to find efficient ways to attract their attention and to emphasize how their products are better than the others. In order to do so, it is necessary to understand what meanings consumers are looking for in their purchases and how it is possible to communicate these meanings to them on social media via celebrity endorsements.

Consumers' perspectives were thoroughly examined in this thesis, allowing to collect meaningful conclusions about psychological influence of parasocial interactions in celebrity endorsements on the consumers. As pointed out by Lueck (2015), parasocial interactions were utilized to create an illusion of emotional intimacy and enhance the persuasiveness of the endorsement. Further research can be focused on exploring how social media posts can be created to be perceived more self-disclosive to the followers. One of the limitations of this study is that all respondents were from Russia and the research reveals conclusions regarding Russian Millennial consumers. Due to such research focus, it was possible to create country-specific conclusions. Future research possibilities can be found in conducting similar research focusing on consumers from other countries. Additionally, interview data was collected from Millennial participants aged 25-28; collecting data from different age group in Millennial cohort or from another generation could provide different insights.

Seven emerged themes could be studied further in order to ensure their generalizability. Additionally, quantitative research would allow to test different variables surrounding these themes. These seven themes could be examined by implementing different methods, that will ensure conclusions' dependability. Only twelve participants were enrolled in

the research, conducting research with large number of participants would provide better insights into phenomenon of parasocial interactions. As suggested by Lueck (2015), socially mediated advertising is complex and new phenomenon, and future research could move past just descriptive analysis. The author suggests that future research should focus on explaining parasocial interactions influence on advertising and look deeper whether it increases endorsed products' market value as well as enhances products' public image. Additionally, Lueck (2015) suggested that newly emerged social media endorsement marketing strategy together with the public interest towards celebrities creates the need for improved theory surrounding advertising and media.

References

Aaker, J. (1997). Dimensions of brand personality. *Journal of Marketing Research, 34*(3), 347-356.

Amos, C., Holmes, G. & Strutton, D. (2008). Exploring the relationship between celebrity endorser effects and advertising effectiveness: A quantitative synthesis of effect size. *International Journal of Advertising, 27*(2), 209-234.

Arndt, J. (1985). On making marketing science more scientific: Role of orientations, paradigms, metaphors, and puzzle solving. *Journal of Marketing, 49*(3), 11-23.

Audrezet, A., de Kerviler, G. & Moulard, J. (2018). Authenticity under threat: When social media influencers need to go beyond self-presentation. *Journal of Business Research,* doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.07.008.

Auter, P. & Palmgreen, P. (2000). Development and validation of a parasocial interaction measure: The audience-persona interaction scale. *Communication Research Reports, 17*(1), 79-89.

Ballantine, P. & Martin, B. (2004). Forming parasocial relationships in online communities. *Advances in Consumer Research, 32*, 197-201.

Belk, R. (1984). Cultural and Historical Differences in Concepts of Self and Their Effects on Attitudes toward Having and Giving. *Advances in Consumer Research*, *11*(1), 753–760.

Bergkvist, L., Hjalmarson, H. & Mägi, A. (2016). A new model of how celebrity endorsements work: attitude toward the endorsement as a mediator of celebrity source and endorsement effects. *International Journal of Advertising*, *35*(2), 171–184.

Bergkvist, L. & Zhou, K. (2016). Celebrity endorsements: A literature review and research agenda. *International Journal of Advertising, 35*(4), 642-663.

Bruell, A. (2013). Multinationals rush to global planning; media-consumption shift to digital prompts worldwide view. *Advertising Age, 84*(2), 10.

Burr, V. (2015). *Social constructionism* (Third ed.). London: Routledge.

Cai, Y., & Chen, Y. (2012). Mining influential bloggers: From general to domain specific, from explicit to implicit. *International Journal of Knowledge-Based and Intelligent Engineering Systems, 16*(4), 223-233.

Castellano, S., & Dutot, V. (2017). Investigating the influence of E-word-of-mouth on E-reputation. *International Studies of Management & Organization, 47*(1), 42-60.

Chung, S. & Cho, H. (2017). Fostering parasocial relationships with celebrities on social media: Implications for celebrity endorsement. *Psychology & Marketing*, *34*(4), 481-495.

Cohen, J. (2001). Defining identification: A theoretical look at the identification of audiences with media characters. *Mass Communication and Society, 4*(3), 245-264.

Cohen, J. (2003). Parasocial breakups: Measuring individual differences in responses to the dissolution of parasocial relationships. *Mass Communication and Society, 6*(2), 191-202.

Djafarova, E. & Rushworth, C. (2017). Exploring the credibility of online celebrities' Instagram profiles in influencing the purchase decisions of young female users. *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 68, 1-7.

Erdogan, Z. (1999). Celebrity endorsement: A literature review. *Journal of Marketing Management, 15*(4), 291-314.

Erfgen, C., Zenker, S., & Sattler, H. (2015). The vampire effect: When do celebrity endorsers harm brand recall? *International Journal of Research in Marketing, 32*(2), 155-163.

Eriksson, P. & Kovalainen, A. (2008). *Qualitative methods in business research*. London: Sage.

Escalas, J. & Bettman, J. (2017). Connecting with celebrities: How consumers appropriate celebrity meanings for a sense of belonging. *Journal of Advertising, 46*(2), 297-308.

Fromm, J. & Garton, C. (2013). *Marketing to millennials: Reach the largest and most influential generation of consumers ever*. New York: AMACOM, American Management Association.

Giles, D. (2002). Parasocial interaction: A review of the literature and a model for future research. *Media Psychology, 4(3),* 279–305.

Griffin, M. (2002). Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, *19*(3), 282-285.

Gummesson, E. (2005). Qualitative research in marketing: Road-map for a wilderness of complexity and unpredictability. *European Journal of Marketing, 39*(3/4), 309.

Henrie, K. & Taylor, D. (2009). Use of persuasion knowledge by the millennial generation. *Young Consumers, 10(1),* 71-81.

Hoffner, C., & Buchanan, M. (2005). Young adults' wishful identification and television characters: The role of perceived similarity and character attributes. *Media Psychology, 7*, 323-349.

Horton, D. & Wohl, R. (1956). Mass communication and para-social interaction: Observations on intimacy at a distance. *Psychiatry*, *19*(3), 215-229.

Hovland, C. & Weiss, W. (1951). The influence of source credibility on communication effectiveness. *The Public Opinion Quarterly, 15*(4), 635-650.

Hudson, L. & Ozanne, J. (1988). Alternative ways of seeking knowledge in consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Research, 14*(4), 508-521.

Hung, K. (2014). Why celebrity sells: A dual entertainment path model of brand endorsement. *Journal of Advertising, 43*(2), 155-166.

Kahle, L. & Homer, P. (1985). Physical Attractiveness of the Celebrity Endorser: A Social Adaptation Perspective. *Journal of Consumer Research, 11*, 954-961.

Kamins, M. (1990). An investigation into the "match-up" hypothesis in celebrity advertising: When beauty may be only skin deep. *Journal of Advertising, 19* (1), 4-13.

Kamins, M., Brand, M., Hoeke, S. & Moe, J. (1989). Two-sided versus one-sided celebrity endorsements: The impact on advertising effectiveness and credibility. *Journal of Advertising, 18*(2), 4-10.

Kaplan, A. & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons*, *53*(1), 59-68.

Karlíček, M. & Kuvita, T. (2014). The risk of vampire effect in advertisements using celebrity endorsement. *Central European Business Review, 3*(3), 16-22.

Kassing, J. W., & Sanderson, J. (2009). "You're the kind of guy that we all want for a drinking buddy": Expressions of parasocial interaction on Floydlandis.com. *Western Journal of Communication, 73*, 182-203.

Katz, E. & Lazarsfeld, P. (1955). *Personal influence: The part played by people in the flow of mass communications*. Glencoe, (Ill.): Free Press.

Katz, E., Blumler, J. & Gurevitch, M. (1973). Uses and Gratifications Research. *The Public Opinion Quarterly 37*(4), 509-523.

Kelting, K., & Rice, D. (2013). Should we hire David Beckham to endorse our brand? contextual interference and consumer memory for brands in a celebrity's endorsement portfolio. *Psychology & Marketing, 30*(7), 602-613.

Kietzmann, J., Hermkens, K., McCarthy, I. & Silvestre, B. (2011). Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media. *Business Horizons, 54*(3), 241-251.

Kim, J. & Song, H. (2016). Celebrity's self-disclosure on twitter and parasocial relationships: A mediating role of social presence. *Computers in Human Behaviour, 62*, 570-577.

Knoll, J., Schramm, H., Schallhorn, C. & Wynistorf, S. (2015). Good guy vs. bad guy: The influence of parasocial interactions with media characters on brand placement effects. *International Journal of Advertising, 34*(5), 720-743.

Kowalczyk, C. & Pounders, K. (2016). Transforming celebrities through social media: the role of authenticity and emotional attachment. *Journal of Product & Brand Management, 25*(4), 345-356.

Kumar, V. (2015). Evolution of marketing as a discipline: What has happened and what to look out for. *Journal of Marketing, 79*(1), 1-9.

Kwon, O. & Wen, Y. (2010). An empirical study of the factors affecting social network service use. *Computers of Human Behaviour*, *26*, 254-263.

Labrecque, L. (2014). Fostering Consumer–Brand relationships in social media environments: The role of parasocial interaction. *Journal of Interactive Marketing, 28*(2), 134-148.

Li, Y., Lai, C. & Chen, C. (2011). Discovering influencers for marketing in the blogosphere. *Information Sciences, 181*(23), 5143-5157.

Lipsman, A., Mudd, G., Rich, M. & Bruich, S. (2012). The power of "like": How brands reach (and influence) fans through social-media marketing. *Journal of Advertising Research, 52*(1), 40-52.

Lou, C. & Yuan, S. (2018). Influencer marketing: How message value and credibility affect consumer trust of branded content on social media. *Journal of Interactive Advertising,* 1-16.

Lueck, J. (2015). Friend-zone with benefits: The parasocial advertising of Kim Kardashian. *Journal of Marketing Communications, 21*(2), 91-109.

Luo, X., Zhang, J. & Duan, W. (2013). Social media and firm equity value. *Information Systems Research*, *24*(1), 146-163.

Lyons, B. & Henderson, K. (2005). Opinion leadership in a computer-mediated environment. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour, 4* (5), 319-329.

Malhotra, N. & Birks, D. (2007). *Marketing research: An applied approach* (3th ed.). Harlow: Financial Times Prentice Hall.

Martensen, A., Brockenhuus-Schack, S. & Zahid, A. (2018). How citizen influencers persuade their followers. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal, 22*(3), 335-353.

Marwick, A. & Boyd, D. (2011). To see and be seen: Celebrity practice on Twitter. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies, 17*(2), 139-158.

McCormick, K. (2016). Celebrity endorsements: Influence of a product-endorser match on Millennials attitudes and purchase intentions. *Journal Of Retailing And Consumer Services, 32,* 39-45.

McCracken, G. (1989). Who is the Celebrity Endorser? Cultural Foundations of the Endorsement Process. *Journal Of Consumer Research, 16* (3), 310.

Moore, M. (2012). Interactive media usage among millennial consumers. *Journal of Consumer Marketing, 29*(6), 436-444.

Moyer-Gusé, E. (2008). Toward a theory of entertainment persuasion: Explaining the persuasive effects of entertainment-education messages. *Communication Theory, 18*(3), 407-425.

Nowak, L., Thach, L. & Olsen, J. (2006). Wowing the millennials creating brand equity in the wine industry. *Journal of Product and Brand Management, 15*(5), 316-323.

Ohanian, R. (1990). Construction and validation of a scale to measure celebrity. *Journal of Advertising, 19*(3), 39-52.

Ohanian, R. (1991). The impact of celebrity spokespersons' perceived image on consumers' intention to purchase. *Journal of Advertising Research, 31*(1), 46-54.

Onorato, R. & Turner, J. (2004). Fluidity in the self-concept: the shift from personal to social identity. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 34*(3), 257-278.

Perse, E. & Rubin, R. (1989). Attribution in social and parasocial relationships. *Communication Research, 68*, 59-77.

Phua, J., Lin, J. & Lim, D. (2018). Understanding consumer engagement with celebrity-endorsed E-cigarette advertising on Instagram. *Computers in Human Behavior, 84*, 93-102.

Praxmarer, S. (2011). How a presenter's perceived attractiveness affects persuasion for attractiveness-unrelated products. *International Journal of Advertising, 30*(5), 839-839.

Ruef, M., Aldrich, H. & Carter, N. (2003). The structure of founding teams: Homophily, strong ties, and isolation among U.S. entrepreneurs. *American Sociological Review, 68*(2), 195-222.

Russell, C. & Stern, B. (2006). Consumers, characters, and products: A balance model of sitcom product placement effects. *Journal of Advertising, 35*(1), 7-21.

Sääksjärvi, M., Hellén, K., & Balabanis, G. (2016). Sometimes a celebrity holding a negative public image is the best product endorser. *European Journal Of Marketing, 50*(3/4), 421-441.

Saini, A. (2008). U.S. television product placements declined by 15% in the first half of 2008. *Journal of Promotion Management, 14*(1-2), 77-83.

Safko, L. (2012). The Social Media Bible: Tactics, Tools, and Strategies for Business Success. *John Wiley & Sons.* Hoboken, NJ.

Shin, W. & Lin, T. (2016). Who avoids location-based advertising and why? investigating the relationship between user perceptions and advertising avoidance. *Computers in Human Behavior, 63*, 444-452.

Spry, A., Pappu, R. & Cornwell, T. (2011). Celebrity endorsement, brand credibility and brand equity. *European Journal of Marketing, 45*(6), 882-909.

Stern, B., Russell, C. & Russell, D. (2007). Hidden persuasions in soap operas: Damaged heroines and negative consumer effects. *International Journal of Advertising, 26*(1), 9-36.

Thompson, C. (1997). Interpreting consumers: A hermeneutical framework for deriving marketing insights from the texts of consumers' consumption stories. *Journal of Marketing Research, 34*(4), 438-455.

Tian, Q. & Hoffner, C. (2010). Parasocial interaction with liked, neutral, and disliked characters on popular TV series. *Mass Communication and Society*, *13*, 250-269.

Till, B. (1998). Using celebrity endorsers effectively: Lessons from associative learning. *Journal of Product & Brand Management, 7*(5), 400-409.

Till, B. & Shimp, T. (1998). Endorsers in advertising: The case of negative celebrity information. *Journal of Advertising, 27*(1), 67-82.

Turner, J. (1993). Interpersonal and psychological predictors of parasocial interaction with different television performers. *Communication Quarterly, 41*(4), 443-453.

Wang, X., Chunling, Y. & Wei, Y. (2012). Social Media Peer Communication and Impacts on Purchase Intentions: A Consumer Socialization Framework. *Journal of Interactive Marketing, 26* (4), 198-208.

White, D., Goddard, L. & Wilbur, N. (2009). The effects of negative information transference in the celebrity endorsement relationship. *International Journal Of Retail & Distribution Management, 37*(4), 322-335.

Zhu, Y. & Chen, H. (2015). Social media and human need satisfaction: implications for social media marketing. *Business Horizons, 58*(3), 335-345.

Newspaper and Magazine Articles

Bennett, S. (2014, April 25). Social Media Business Statistics, Facts, Figures & Trends 2014. *Adweek.* Retrieved from https://www.adweek.com/digital/social-business-trends-2014/.

Bevilacqua, J. & Del Giudice, E. (2018, April 3). Why brands need to utilize influencer marketing in 2018. *St Joseph Communications*. Retrieved from https://stjoseph.com/insight/influencer-marketing-2018-infographic/.

Bowden, J. (2014, March 17). The Impact of Social Media Marketing Trends on Digital Marketing. *Social Media Today.* Retrieved from

94

https://www.socialmediatoday.com/content/impact-social-media-marketing-trends-digital-marketing.

Dada, G. (2017, November 14). What is Influencer Marketing and how Can Marketers Use it Effectively? *Forbes*. Retrieved from https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescommunicationscouncil/2017/11/14/what-is-influencer-marketing-and-how-can-marketers-use-it-effectively/#66d991f623d1

Dimock, M. (2019, January 17). Defining generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins. *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/

Komonov, M. (2017, November 2). 100 million Russians use social media every day. *PracticalEcommerce*. Retrieved from https://www.practicalecommerce.com/100-million-russians-use-social-media-every-day

M&M GLOBAL (2017, April 21). *Digital marketing trends in Russia: social networks.* Retrieved from http://mandmglobal.com/digital-marketing-trends-in-russia-social-networks/

Russian Search Marketing (2016, November 7). *Social media use: Instagram in Russia.* Retrieved from https://russiansearchmarketing.com/social-media-use-instagram-in-russia/

Shaw, A. (2018, October 16). Three Social Media Best Practices for Business Development. *Forbes*. Retrieved from https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescommunicationscouncil/2018/10/16/three-social-media-best-practices-for-business-development/#66d262665d31

Swant, M. (2016, May 10). Twitter says users now trust influencers nearly as much as their friends. *Adweek*. Retrieved from https://www.adweek.com/digital/twitter-says-users-now-trust-influencers-nearly-much-their-friends-171367/

Talavera, M. (2015, July 14). 10 reasons why influencer marketing is the next big thing. *Adweek*. Retrieved from https://www.adweek.com/digital/10-reasons-why-influencer-marketing-is-the-next-big-thing/

Schroeder, J. (2017, October 31). How to Tap into The Millennial $200 Billion Buying Power with Social Media. *Forbes*. Retrieved from https://www.forbes.com/sites/julesschroeder/2017/10/31/how-to-tap-into-the-millennial-200-billion-buying-power-with-social-media/#143a6f171161

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. List of guiding interview questions.

1. What platforms do you use?
2. How many hours a day you spend on social media?
3. What celebrities do you follow?
4. Why do you follow them?
5. How would you describe these people's personalities in adjectives?
6. What characteristics would you say make this celebrities interesting to follow?
7. Describe the time you subscribed to a celebrity and what made you subscribe?
8. Describe the time you unsubscribed to a celebrity and why?
9. What kind of celebrity content do you like?
10. What kind of celebrity content do you dislike?
11. What is your attitude towards celebrity endorsements on social media?
12. How do you choose what products to buy?
13. What made you buy the product endorsed by celebrity?
14. Describe your decision-making process to buy the product.
15. Did any celebrity made you change your consumer attitude towards a product and why would you say that happened?